

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING LANGUAGES

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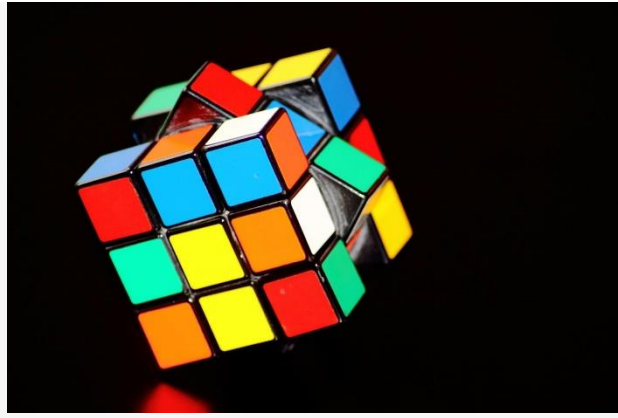
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Part I: Teaching Foreign Languages with Tech-Free Games: More Than Just Review

In my hallway at school, I am famous, and it's not because I have it all together. I plead guilty to zipping into my classroom at the last second just as the bell rings, arms full of papers and mouth full of lunch. I probably don't have those projects graded yet, and you can bet the whiteboard is still covered with last class' conjugations in my third grade handwriting. I am always apologizing to the teacher next door for my students, who are often screaming and thumping their way through Spanish, which brings me to my claim to fame: I am the Queen of Teaching with Games. I may have forgotten to make an extra copy of the study guide and update the parent portal yesterday, but today, you can bank on the fact that if you are coming to my class, you will be playing a game, and the competition will be fierce.

Why Play So Many Games in the Classroom?

Too often, teachers dismiss the powerful pedagogical tool of games until the very end of a unit when it is time to review for the test, we then hurriedly throw multiple concepts into a computerized, trivia-style game such as Kahoot or Jeopardy, essentially dumping random questions onto already-anxious students. But how much learning is actually taking place in one end-of-unit review game? **By treating games as a cherry-on-top activity, they becomes just that: an optional garnish that you could take or leave.** We miss their potential to be meat and potatoes.

In foreign language, and in many other disciplines, games hold an incredible power: fun, and necessary repetition. I say "fun repetition" because the right game can replace and even surpass the dreaded worksheet. I say "necessary repetition" because **in our race to finish the curriculum, we omit slowing down to practice a concept and, consequently, omit deep and meaningful learning.** We must start seeing games as necessary tools for checking understanding and solidifying learning throughout a unit.

More Fun than a Worksheet: The Benefits of Having More Games

Perhaps the greatest gift we can bestow upon our students is just a new, life-giving way to learn. If you teach during the last block of the day, you know that kids walk into your classroom dead on arrival, and who can blame them? They have sat for hours, listening to teachers lecture and taking notes. The idleness of their bodies mirrors the idleness of their minds, and we must challenge them differently by acknowledging and involving their physical bodies and social needs. In my classroom, my students work with each other a lot in "Spanglish," and they laugh a lot.

Games often require splitting into groups, and groups can foster collaboration and accountability. **Many of my games require every person in a group to be the expert, which in turn makes the stronger students teach the weaker students of the group so they can win against another group.** Grouping also allows for different paces of learning. One group may only get to play one round of a game while another group may play two or three times; what's most important is that all students are practicing for the same amount of time, and no one sits waiting.

I have noticed that with frequent games, students are less obstinate and more willing to do textbook work when I ask them. **Because I don't beat them over the head with book and paper every class, students see traditional practice as relatively painless (and even meaningful!).** I often use textbook exercises as our clarification check before we put it into practice in the game.

If Frequently Playing Games in the Classroom is so Powerful, Why Don't More Teachers Teach this Way?

Playing games often requires group work, which means letting go of control. It means a teacher or administrator might walk by and misinterpret the sea of loud students mingling about. Yet risking being misunderstood is so much more rewarding than idle minds and bodies checked out from learning.

Most importantly to us as teachers, many games require lots of time and work on the part of the teacher. I am entering my sixth year of teaching, and I am just now at a point where I have a stockpile of games ready to go, but there have been many times I have spent hours making a game that lasts twenty minutes. **It's important to type, laminate, rubber-band, and organize games you make so you don't redo them year after year.** You might also consider having students help you make games as an after-school assignment.

I can think of many moments sitting in my bed writing on Jenga blocks and taping pictures to decks of cards. Is it worth it? Absolutely. Because every single time, there is a kid who physically jumps in her seat excited to learn - and that makes those extra hours worth it!

Avoiding the Hunger Games: Tips for Successful Game Implementation

Strongly tie every part of your game to deep learning.

Games should not be seen as fillers and, sometimes, they are not worth the time spent playing them. Just because I am teaching my students medical vocabulary doesn't mean I should play Operation; but before I move on, I should challenge myself: can I manipulate the game of Operation to involve more than just pulling objects out of a body and, say, make students speak Spanish using specific grammar/vocabulary I have taught them when they pull the objects out? The answer is almost always yes.

Do not play for points.

I have never once played a game for extra points on an assessment. Each year at the beginning of the year when I explain our first game, I have a student ask, "So what do we get if we win?" This is a consumer mentality that I quickly change from the get-go. What students get is meaningful, fun learning, and if you stick to your guns and help students see this, they will buy into learning for learning's sake, all while avoiding the bloodbath that is one group getting extra points on the test while everyone else doesn't.

Provide Structure, Rules, and Goals that Keep Students On Task and Held Accountable.

How do you know the students in the back corner are using Spanish during Operation and aren't just getting carried away in childhood nostalgia? You can certainly be walking around, but that's not enough. Create structure and rules to create accountability when you can't be there to oversee (i.e. - a student can call out another student for not using Spanish when they removed the butterfly from the stomach, and so they have to put it back).

Model to Avoid Meltdown.

Students like to argue with each other, and if you're in a foreign language classroom, there's nothing like kids fighting over the rules to drag down that Spanish-speaking environment. Before you pass out a single game card or piece, call up a few volunteers and model the game, demonstrating possible scenarios where confusion might arise. This takes time you may not have accounted for, but without going over expectations, you risk the game flopping or turning into war.

Games are a Privilege, not a Right.

Students know that all of my lessons are interactive, but they also know that if they don't follow directions and do not meet learning goals during the game, the game will stop and traditional exercises will be assigned, increasing their homework load. Students also know that we build our way to a game, and the foundational building blocks require taking notes and doing exercises first. If students sit back during tutorial time, they don't get to play the game.

Familiarity Breeds Contempt.

Don't overplay a particular style of game. I never play the same game more than once a month. It will be tempting to play a game again immediately after it is a hit (especially when students beg for it), but it's important to teach students that our plan does not revolve around their requests. This also makes the game super special when you surprise them with it again a few months later.

Consider Non-Technology Games First.

The internet is a very powerful tool for games, but I have found that it interrupts and detracts from collaboration and overall student engagement. A Spanish game, no matter how creative, cannot compete with the temptation to check social media on a different tab. I very rarely have students use devices to play games.

PART II: THE GAME SET (A)

1. : Description Bingo

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; listening comprehension
- **How to Play:** Increase the difficulty of your standard game of BINGO by moving away from basic English-Spanish translation (i.e., the teacher says “fish” and student looks for “fish” on their BINGO board) and toward challenging listening comprehension of Spanish description (Teacher says “An animal in the ocean that swims; we often eat it.”). Playing BINGO this way taps into the joy of childhood nostalgia for BINGO while also providing a challenging game.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Always have copies of BINGO sheets ready to go in your classroom in case you finish a lesson early and have ten minutes to fill.
 - Giving each student a sticky note to shred into pieces for “tokens” removes the need for buying actual tokens.
 - Always give students a limited word bank from which to draw (use students’ vocabulary lists, or words you project on the board).
 - Keep students accountable! If they call out “BINGO,” make them not only say their words in Spanish, but also their translation into English. You can even make them say a description back to you. You can play single rounds or, play “blackout” by covering the entire board.
 - This is a great game if you put “description in the target language” on your assessments.

2. Who Am I?

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; forming descriptions in target language
- **How to Play:** The teacher will walk around the room and put a sticky-note on the forehead of each student. Written on the sticky-note is either a famous person (if your goal is to practice adjectives) or a vocabulary word (i.e., toothbrush, tree, journal). In groups of 3-5, students must guess their identity by asking “yes” or “no” questions.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - This game works best when you choose the groups. There is too much potential for distraction/bickering.
 - Tell students they are playing for a particular amount of time (15 min, 20 min, 25 min), and if they guess their identity, they are to raise their hand and get a new one from the teacher.
 - Using standard sheets of mailing labels is better than sticky notes, since they stay on better. I use the label setting in Microsoft Word and even print out my labels.
 - You must provide a word bank. This game can be challenging in one’s native language, so it’s important to provide a finite list of possibilities. My “list” is anywhere from 25-40 words long.
 - Very important: Students can only guess their identity twice before they’re “out.” This is to avoid students not practicing skills and only asking, “Am I X? Am I Y? Am I Z?” The point is for them to independently form descriptions, not for them to read off names on the word bank.
 - I tell students that just because someone in your group has Taylor Swift on their forehead doesn’t mean you don’t have it on yours, too. Don’t let them rule out anything unless they have asked a question.
 - Provide scaffolding by not only modeling a round with students beforehand, but also giving them sentence stems or categories to use if they seem lost. Example for famous people: consider asking about age, physical characteristics, personality.
 - Create a “penalty” if students use “Spanglish,” since they will want to use it every time. My penalty is that they are skipped if they use English. The goal is to focus on what they do know how to say, rather than what they don’t know how to say.
 - The “yes” or “no” questions often result in more than “yes” or “no” responses from the rest of the group. Kids will often say things like, “Well, you used to be this way, but not now.” This kind of answering is not allowed. I tell the kids if it is mostly “yes,” you say “yes.” If it is mostly “no,” you say no.

3. Password

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; word association
- **How to Play:** Students work in groups of four. They are to sit across from their partner. They are trying to get their partner to say a vocabulary word by giving only a one-word description. Just like the traditional game of password, the first pair begins, and if they get the word right, they get 10 points. Otherwise, the next pair gets to go, and they not only get to hear a new one-word clue, but they also get to use the previous pair's clue to figure out the vocabulary word. It's now worth 9 points. The pairs go back and forth until a pair gets it right.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - This is not charades, so students aren't supposed to physically act things out.
 - This is a really important game to model. One might even show a clip of the Password TV show.
 - A word bank is needed.

4. Trashketball

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; listening comprehension
- **How to Play:** Crumble up a few pieces of paper and wad them together into a ball, securing it with masking tape. Use your trash can (a recycling bin is too easy) as a basketball hoop, and put it on a desk at the front of the room. Students are divided in teams, and in the same style as the buzzer game, they take turns representing their team to both answer a question and shoot. This is a game of speed—the first person to answer a question correctly earns the right to shoot. Using masking tape, create different shots that are worth different points based on their difficulty.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Be funny and challenging, making them laugh and repeat funny Spanish. I have the “Little Child Shot” (10 pts.- Close-range shot. They have to say “I’m a little child” before they shoot), the “Wall-Booger Shot” (25 pts.- they stand against the wall, put their finger in their nose, and say in Spanish, “I have a booger!” before shooting), the “Teacher Shot” (50 pts.- they sit in my desk chair, proclaim in Spanish, “I love Ms. Rocamora,” and shoot), and the coveted “Bathroom Shot “(100 pts.- they stand outside of the room, cry out in Spanish that they have to use the potty, and shoot. If they make this shot, they get a picture of their face on my Wall of Fame. If they make this shot, expect roaring and teachers coming by to complain). If they forget to say their required phrase, the shot doesn’t count.
 - This serves as a great end-of-unit review. My kids will ask for this game constantly, especially my athletes, but stick to your guns and do it no more than one time per unit

5. Fly-Swatter

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; listening comprehension
- **How to Play:** Write vocabulary words all over a large white board. Split the class into two teams. One student from each team goes to the board with a fly swatter in their hand. Representing their team with no outside help, the two students face the class with their back to the white board. The teacher gives a clue (either the English translation, a description in the target language, the word's antonym, etc.) and then says "go!". The two students are then allowed to turn around and look at the words. The first person to swat the right word wins.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Do not allow students to randomly hit as many words until they get the correct one. You may want to create a rule that they are only allowed to have so many swats.
 - This game works best with dozens of words on the board so it's challenging to find them.

6. Verb Relay

- **Learning Goal(s):** Verb conjugation accuracy
- **How to Play:** Have students sit in small groups either in a circle or in a row (one student behind another). Each group has one piece of paper and one pencil with three blank conjugation charts (I, you, he/she, we, they/you all). When all groups are ready, the teacher writes three infinitives on the board. Student then compete against other groups to conjugate those verbs as fast as they can in a specific tense. Students must pass the paper within their group so all students are participating.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - A student is allowed to write one conjugation at a time. If the verb is “bailar,” one student writes “bailo.” The student must then pass the paper to the next student. Writing more than one word leads to a 10 second penalty in which the teacher collects the paper for 10 seconds.
 - No waiting student is allowed to tell the writing student the answer. If a student sees that their group member is writing an incorrect conjugation, they must wait until it is their own turn to erase and correct their group member’s mistake. This counts as that student’s turn, so when they make the correction, they must then pass the paper. Cheating results in a 10 second penalty.
 - After the conjugations are complete, one student from each group brings the paper to the teacher. If there are no errors, the group wins. If there are errors, the teacher says the number of errors they have, and the group collectively must review and discuss their answers and correct the mistakes. The teacher should not tell the group where the mistakes are! The group should review together.

7. Dickey Conjugation

- **Learning Goal(s):** Verb conjugation accuracy
- **How to Play:** Project/Draw on the board two columns. In the left column, write 6 verbs in the infinitive and number them #1-6. In the right column, write 6 subject forms (I, Carlos, Carmen and me, they, we, you, etc.) and number them #1-6. In pairs, students roll two dice. One dice is for the left column, and one dice is for the right. If students roll a “2” and a “3,” for example, they will conjugate the second verb in the third form. This game can get old quickly, so see ways to change it up below.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Set up the room like speed dating so partners are sitting across from each other. Continuously switch up partners after playing a few rounds.
 - Set up the room so two students are sitting across from each other, and the rest of the class is behind these two students. The winner gets to stay seated while the loser has to get up and join the back of the line.
 - Continuously change the slides so there are always new verbs.
 - Add a third die and a third column so students practice more than one tense: present/present progressive/preterite/imperfect/future/present perfect. If students don't know this many tenses, repeat them over so #1-6 reads “1,3,5 Present, 2,4,6 Present Progressive.”

8. What Are You Doing?

- **Learning Goal(s):** Verb conjugation accuracy (present progressive); listening comprehension; improvisation
- **How to Play:** This game practices the present progressive. In a circle, a student begins by asking the person to their left, “What are you doing?” The student responds with “I am _____ (activity).” Let’s say the student has said, “I am playing basketball.” The student who originally asked the question must now act out that activity. They will pretend to dribble, shoot etc. for a few seconds before the next person will ask them, “What are you doing?” The person playing basketball must tell what they’re doing, and they can say anything except, “I am playing basketball.” They may say, “I am dancing the Tango.” The “asker” will then dance the tango until asked, “What are you doing?”
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Smaller circles work better (no more than 10)
 - Have students do a pre-exercise first, practicing both the present progressive and privately brainstorming different activities in Spanish. This keeps the game flowing, and it makes it less likely for a kid to say, “I don’t know what to do.”
 - Encourage students to be creative and not just list sports, hobbies, etc. Of course, remind them that inappropriate suggestions will result in termination of play.
 - Don’t be afraid to jump in for one yourself!

9. Story Train

- **Learning Goal(s):** Forming sentences in target language; using vocabulary in context
- **How to Play:** Students are each given a piece of paper with a sentence written on it. These sentences are story starters and are all different, but the main subject is underlined. Students are required to add onto the story by writing their own sentence below it. The catch is that they are to use the same subject and underline it (to keep the story intact), and they are to use some targeted requirement (the past tense, specific vocabulary, etc.). This requirement can be the same requirement each time they write a sentence, or it can be a new requirement each time. They then fold the original sentence the teacher wrote and pass it to the person next to them so that all the next person can see is the sentence the previous student just wrote. Play for however many rounds you want, and then have students open up their paper-fans and read the stories.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Use a timer to keep the pace going so students feel accountable not to procrastinate.
 - Make sure you make it clear that this activity that encourages creativity, but not inappropriate responses.

10. Avalanche!

- **Learning Goal(s):** Translating whole sentences into target language
- **How to Play:**
- Take 20 index cards and divide them into two stacks of 10. For each stack, on one side of the index cards, #1-10. On a white board, tape each stack of cards in its own column so that the numbers are facing up and #10 is at the top while #1 is at the bottom. These cards serve to cover up sentences you write on the board or print and tape to the board. **Underneath each card, have sentences written in English that you want students to translate into Spanish.** The sentence for card #1 should be easier than the sentence for card #10. **IMPORTANT:** The sentences should not be identical for both columns of #1-#10, but they should be equal in difficulty. Ex: #1 in one column could say, “I like to eat bananas.” and #1 in the second column could say, “You like to drink milk.” Students are split into two teams, and they are to form one single file line in front of their column on the board. They will only work with their assigned column. When the teacher says go, the first student from each team takes off the #1 card at the bottom of their column, and with a dry erase marker, translates the English sentence into Spanish. While they are writing, their back is to their teammates and they cannot have any help. To tell the teacher they have “locked in” their answer, they turn around. Once they have turned around, it is the teacher’s job to check the sentence. If any single part of the sentence is wrong, the team receives an “avalanche”—a white out—and the teacher erases their whole answer. **The next student has to then attempt the translation over.** If a student gets the translation correct, their sentence stays on the board—for now. If the next student incorrectly translates sentence #2, both sentences #1 and #2 are wiped out, hence the name “AVALANCHE!” Students will end up rewriting the same sentences over and over, which helps them learn them. Students may work together to translate sentences only when it is not their turn and only if the person at the board can’t hear them. Any cheating, hinting, etc. receives an avalanche. Once a sentence is “uncovered” once, it stays uncovered, so students can think and help each other when it is not their turn.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Be sure to narrate yourself erasing in the applicable language; for me, that’s “AVALANCHE!” but for you, it might be “L’AVALANCHE!”
 - Be careful to make sure sentences are equitable, meaningful to what you’re studying, and progressively challenging as you go up. Know your audience and your students’ abilities.

- Laminate your numbered index cards so it's easy to replay this game. Also type and save your sentences so it's easy to modify and use sentences in subsequent years. Once you have played this game once in a chapter, your only prep should be printing, cutting, and taping.

11. Behind the Door

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; listening comprehension; verb conjugation
- **How to Play:** This game requires a Smartboard (or similar). Have multiple slides ready ahead of time that have four doors. These could be square shapes or actual pictures of doors. Students need to be able to walk up to the Smartboard and, with their finger, move a “door” aside to see what’s behind it. Your pre-made slide needs to be variations of the same idea: behind one door is 100 pts, behind a second door 50, behind a third door 0, and behind a fourth door -25. You can also play with pictures of vocab words—a whale could mean 100 pts, a dolphin could be 50, a jellyfish 0, and a shark -25. Create about 20 slides with the point values mixed up each time behind different doors (although I like to keep some consecutive slides the same). Break up the class into two teams, and ask questions of players representing their team. These questions can be vocabulary words, facts about the target language’s country, or simple conversational practice. They cannot get help from their team, so other students should be studying until it’s their turn so they don’t let their team down. The winner of each question, like a Trashketball, gets a chance to score points for their team by choosing a door. They slide open the door to find a point value. This game is fun because they can both win and lose points, so it keeps the game interesting.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Give this game a chance. I don’t know why, but my kids 14-18 years old love it.

12. Puzzle Pieces

- **Learning Goal(s):** Vocabulary acquisition; verb conjugation; verb differentiation
- **How to Play:** Take an 8.5 x 11 piece of paper and fold it four times. When you open it up, you should have 16 squares. Use this folded paper as a template for a puzzle. For every creased line, write both above and below it with two words that go together such as “tomato” and “el tomate.” You do not have to be consistent about putting English above and Spanish below or vice versa. Do not write on the line itself. Once you have filled up all creased lines (a total of 24 words/translations), you should have completely blank edges bordering the paper. Don’t stop there! To make this puzzle harder, use the blank edges to have students practice conjugations of a tense by writing “yo/bailar” or verb differentiation such as ser v. estar (“Yo ____ un doctor”). When you fill the edges and the puzzle is complete, first make copies of the puzzle, then laminate them, and then cut them out along the now invisible creases. In groups, have students assemble the puzzle on a desk covered in butcher paper. Then have students “answer” the questions along the edges, writing their answers on the butcher paper. When they finish, they should call the teacher over to have them check their answers.
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Print different sets on different colored paper so one puzzle is green while another is blue, etc. This keeps pieces from being mixed up in groups.
 - Photocopying often cuts off the questions on the edges, so make sure you leave some space and not write too close to the border of the puzzle.

Part III: Seven Foreign Language Vocabulary Games to Banish Boredom from Your Classes

Do you know what games and ninjas have in common?

They both sneak up on you, then pack a mean punch.

That's right. Vocabulary games sneak right up on language students. At first, they just think that the games are for fun. Then, boom! They're already learning and they didn't even know it.

Great teachers know this and have employed games to both demolish boredom and increase retention in the classroom. Games have proven themselves to be nifty tools in teaching a second language - especially vocabulary.

Vocabulary words lend themselves easily to games and students of all ages can quickly memorize a ton of new words just by engaging in a game or two.

How Vocabulary Games Benefit Your Students

Teaching vocabulary is one of those fork-in-the-road moments. Students can either learn it in the most mind-numbing manner or in the most awesome way. For reasons quite obvious, I encourage you to take the latter route.

You can employ common activities like "Show & Tell" and role-playing, and then simply integrate target vocabulary words in the activities. But there's nothing quite as directly effective as playing vocabulary games that were specifically designed to teach and reinforce vocabulary.

No scene on earth is more fulfilling than a whole class or team high-fiving because they just got another point. You know right away that it would be very difficult for those students to forget the crucial words that win them (or lose them) precious points.

Why?

Well the reasons are many:

1. Games anchor vocabulary in context.

A strong memory of vocabulary words is created through **the firsthand experience of playing**. The activity of the game and interactions with other students create context for word usage.

A dry list of words and their corresponding translations doesn't work because these words only exist in a vacuum. On the other hand, vocabulary words that come up in games are very hard to forget. For example, your students will probably never forget the tie-breaker word that made them win a prize—very much like how ballplayers never forget the winning plays in a championship series even when the games were played years ago.

2. Games create more brain connections.

They contain distinct elements that cater the various types of learners in your class.

For example, because they're often played with colorful props, games cater to the appetites of visual learners. Many games, like Charades and Pictionary, require physical movement. These games motivate

the kinesthetic (hands-on) learners who can never sit still. And because some games will involve excitedly shouting out the answers, games are a treat for auditory learners as well!

3. Games create absorption.

They motivate students to focus and tune everything else out. It's this excited concentration and readiness to engage in the activity that allows vocabulary words to be retained in long-term memory. You've probably had the experience of speaking in front of a quiet class, wondering if the bit you're teaching is simply going over their heads or not.

Without strong focus, it's very difficult to have learning that sticks. But games are so engaging that they invite and maintain the faithful focus of students. That's why, with games, students aren't only having fun, they're also learning.

How to Make Games Both Entertaining and Educational

Maintain a high energy level

When you start, start big. Big smiles. Big voice. Big gestures. Make them feel that something awesome is about to happen.

The whole class is feeding off your energy. So it's actually very important that you have fun yourself. Your students will catch on very quickly and realize that if teacher is having a great time, they should be also. They'll let their guard down and open their minds.

During the game, maintain a **positive attitude**. Tell them it's no big deal if they commit some slip ups. For example, if a student guesses an answer wrong, tell them they'll get it next time. Always be encouraging. Tell them it's okay that their team is a little behind, they can make up for it soon. Congratulate correct answers, and motivate them to get through the misses.

As a teacher, it's not only your responsibility to teach vocabulary, it's your higher responsibility to keep your students motivated to learn.

Find teachable moments during the brouhaha

Never forget that games aren't an end to themselves. It's not even important who wins first place. If your wards are learning, then it's really a win-win.

Any time you sense a teachable moment, seize it. Let's say, in a game of Spanish Pictionary, one of the students drew what's clearly the image of a girl. During the melee, you hear one of the students scream "*Niño! Niño! Niño!*" Capitalize on that mistake after the time is up. Before going to the next word, briefly explain the difference between *niño* (boy) and *niña* (girl).

Repeat the same words in different kinds of games

Learning is about the proper kind of repetition. You know as a teacher that simple repetition will quickly get boring. You need to address each vocabulary lesson by using different tools, providing different stimuli and targeting different senses.

One way of doing this is using different games in cementing the same set of vocabulary. So, for example, you may teach French animal names using Pictionary for visual stimuli. Then you may have to follow that up with a "Blind Man's Zoo" game where you let your students sound off the different sounds animals make. Meooowwww!

Make a little competition go a long way

If you lose to a computer in chess, it probably won't matter. But losing in jump rope to one of your co-teachers gets your goat, doesn't it? I'm willing to bet that you'll buy a jump rope from the sports equipment store and practice on your own at home so you would be ready next time a challenge comes up.

So divide your class into equal groups. Let them play against each other. Boys versus girls is always a hit. A little competition will pump adrenaline into your students' system. It'll also pump those vocabulary words into their heads.

Reward students with a simple prize

It can be a piece of candy or a star stamped on their notebooks, a prize is really just a symbol of success and victory. It's what the prize represents—the bragging rights, the thought of besting all the others, the sense of achievement.

So, when conducting your games, try to build the stakes up every now and again with prizes. This shouldn't be anything that burns a hole in your pocket, but rather a simple token of achievement—a symbol that helps the student remember, *“Ha! I won. Good for me.”*

Let students participate in picking the words for the games

When students are involved in the process of creating the game, they become more engaged in it. Ask the class to give some vocabulary words to be included in the upcoming games. It warms the heart of any student when she sees her word giving the other team a hard time in a game of Charades.

If the activity involves some props, ask some of your students for help. Encourage them to negotiate the terms of the contest, what rules should be followed and which props should be employed.

Do this and you'll soon observe that your students will rally behind the activity and ensure its success all on their own.

PART IV: THE GAME SET (B)

1. Two Classics: Charades & Pictionary

These two are classics and probably need little instruction.



Charades and Pictionary are competitive games played between two teams of equal sizes. Each team is composed of one wild gesticulator or one fuzzy sketch artist and a thousand screamers. Have the team leader draw a word from a vocabulary pool, after which he gestures or draws the word to be guessed correctly by his teammates. Each team's turn is 45 seconds.

Charades in particular would be fun for learning verbs, so don't forget to include words like dance, catch, run, shout, eat, swim and jump in there. **Pictionary is very useful for learning nouns**. Objects like cup, books, balls, door and apple are easy to draw. They can serve to boost your students' confidence levels with the subject.

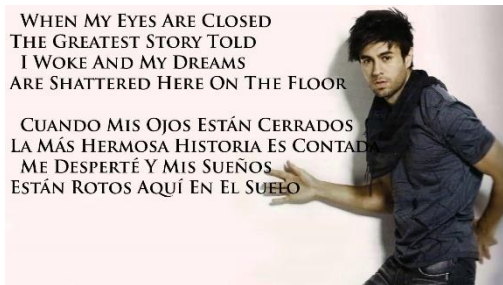
2. Bring Me!

Think back to long ago when you used to help mom in the kitchen. Remember when she asked you to get all those tools and kitchen implements that you didn't even know existed? You used to run to her side bringing what you thought was a "ladle" when it was actually a "spatula."

Well, this time, you're mom and you're gonna ask your students to **bring all sorts of stuff**. There are no teams in this game. It's every man for himself. Bring Me! is ideal for learning nouns—objects that can be found in the classroom or the immediate environment.

As mentioned in the previous section, make use of teachable moments during the game. If, for example, you asked your Spanish class to bring you "*zapatos*" (shoes) and somebody runs to you with a hat ("*sombrero*"), take the time to explain the difference before proceeding to the next word.

3. Translate-athon



This is a game that your students can play sitting down and do individually. Translate-athon is a translation exercise where you **give each student the lyrics to a popular song from the target language**. Their job is to translate as many words in there as possible.

You can vary the rules by telling them to translate just the verbs, nouns or adjectives. You can also do this by starting from English and translating to the target language.

Give the class 15 minutes. Then tell them to exchange papers and grade the papers as a class. When you give them the correct translations, take time to explain the lyrics as a whole. So if there's a story behind the song, tell it to the class. This will provide context for those vocabulary words and will be used to anchor the words in memory.

4. Post It!



This game provides a **visual component to the vocabulary words** by associating them with the actual objects—an ideal vehicle for teaching nouns like table, chair, book, wall, shoes, bag and pen.

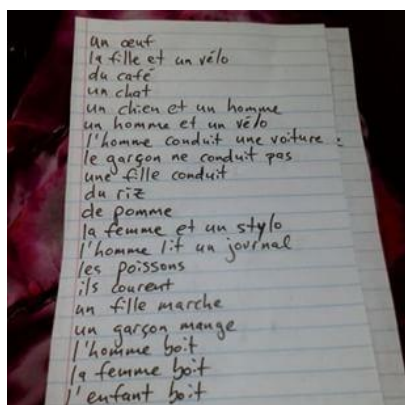
Prepare a list of 20 nouns (depending on the number of students in your class) and write each one on a piece of paper. Fold the papers, containing one vocabulary word each, and drop them in a bowl or container. Make sure that the objects referred to are highly visible and available in the immediate game environment. If not, bring the items to class and set them on the table. Mix them up with some dummy items to add to the challenge.

This game is played individually. Each student takes a turn drawing from the bowl. Then they're given 15 seconds to locate the object and stick the paper to it. The student has 3 tries to get the correct answer. If they fail, then a classmate is given the chance to take a shot at it.

After a student successfully gives the correct answer, take the object, show it to the whole class and engage in a quick vocabulary lesson. Give a brief word repetition, definition, translation and usage examples. So, for example, if the word is “*cuchara*” (spoon), concentrate on that word for a few minutes and explore it by asking questions like, “*Who can give me examples of food where we ordinarily use the cuchara?*”

After that brief intermission, let another student draw from the bowl.

5. Scavenger Hunt



Who doesn't love a language learning Scavenger Hunt?

This one can be played individually or in teams. This would be great in a park, a playground, a field or any large open space where students can exercise those legs and roam around. (A scavenger hunt inside the classroom is chaos with a capital “C.”)

Give the class a list of 10-15 things they need to find. For example, in a German class you can include words like *stein* (rock), *blume* (flower) or *holz* (wood). Throw in some shockers that gain them triple points, like *wurm* (worm) or *vogel/biene* (bird/chick). They don't have to physically collect all the objects, either. They could write a list, take pictures or do drawings once they find them.

Some of the items might be more challenging to locate, but your students will never forget the German words that they learn in the process of digging for a *wurm*.

You can throw in adjectives to add specificity to the task. For example, they aren't just looking for any flower, but a “*rote blume*” (red flower).

After 30 minutes, blow your whistle signaling the class to meet at a designated spot. The student with the most correct items wins! (Give the class one minute to be at the meeting place. Late arrivals get appropriate point deductions.)

6. Simon Says

Simon Says can be used to teach verbs, nouns, even adjectives.

You are, of course, Simon, so keep a list of commands handy. The game only has two rules: If the command begins with the phrase “Simon Says,” the command should be obeyed. If it doesn’t, then nobody should dare move. Easy enough? Try it in a foreign language.

Divide the class into two teams. For each round, the team sends one representative to the front of the class. Position the two students so that they’re facing the class and your back is to the class. There will be 3 commands for each round. After the round, another set of representatives steps up.

Calibrate the commands according to the levels of your students. For early beginners, you might try throwing in some English in the commands. So in a German class, you could say: “*Simon says, touch your ohren (ears)!*” or “*Simon says, sitzen (sit) on the floor!*”

Remember, facilitate the games with a high energy level.

For this to be fun, be quick with your commands and demand urgency as well. If you fake really well, your students will fall all over themselves following a command that don’t even need movement.

7. Two-step Boggle



This is an added twist to the classic game Boggle.

Prepare a 6×5 matrix of letters written on a piece of paper (eg. Manila paper) big enough for the whole class to see when attached on the board. You can make as many matrices as you like.

The letters should not all be random. In fact, embed in the matrix the vocabulary words that you want them to learn. That is, “feed” them the words. Arrange the letters so they can get words like cat, car, can, cane, etc. (If your students aren’t familiar with Boggle, tell them that they only need to “chain” the letters together to form an English word.)

That’s the first step.

The second step involves translating their English words to the target language. So for example, in a Spanish class, the words above should come out as: *gato, coche, lata, bastón*. For an extra challenging round, have them search for words in the target language directly.

Give them seven minutes for this exercise. In checking the answers, call out students to go to the board and point to how they chained the English words. The student/s with the highest number of correct answers get a treat!

That’s it! seven vocabulary games that will cement vocabulary words in the long-term memories of your students. Play them often and you’ll notice a leap in learning for those students lucky enough to be under your care.

Happy teaching!

PART V: TEN BEST GAMES FOR ESL TEACHERS

Games and fun activities are a vital part of [teaching English as a foreign language](#). Whether you're teaching adults or children, games will liven up your lesson and ensure that your students will leave the classroom wanting more.

Games can be used to warm up the class before your lesson begins, during the lesson to give students a break when you're tackling a tough subject, or at the end of class when you have a few minutes left to kill. There are literally hundreds, probably thousands, of games that you can play with your students. EFL games are used to test vocabulary, practice conversing, learn tenses - the list is endless.

This list of ten classic ESL games every teacher should know will help get you started and feeling prepared. Having these up your sleeve before stepping into the classroom will ensure your lessons run smoothly, and, should things get a little out of control, you'll be able to pull back the attention of the class in no time.

Don't have a job yet? Check our [teaching job board](#) for the latest openings around the world!

1. Board Race

There isn't an [EFL teacher](#) I know who doesn't use this game in the classroom. Board Race is a fun game that is used for revising vocabulary, whether it be words from the lesson you've just taught or words from a lesson you taught last week. It can also be used at the start of the class to get students active. It is a great way of testing what your students already know about the subject you're about to teach.

- **Why use it?** Revising vocabulary; grammar
- **Who it's best for:** Appropriate for all levels and ages

How to play:

First, watch this helpful video of real teachers using this game in the classroom by [BridgeTEFL](#):

This is best played with 6 students or more - the more, the better. I've used it in classes ranging from 7-25 years of age and it's worked well in all age groups. Here's a step by step explanation:

- Split the class into two teams and give each team a colored marker.
- If you have a very large class, it may be better to split the students into teams of 3 or 4.
- Draw a line down the middle of the board and write a topic at the top.
- The students must then write as many words as you require related to the topic in the form of a relay race.
- Each team wins one point for each correct word. Any words that are unreadable or misspelled are not counted.

2. Call My Bluff / Two Truths and A Lie

Call My Bluff is a fun game which is perfect at the start of term as a 'getting to know you' kind of game. It is also a brilliant ice breaker between students if you teach classes who do not know one another -- and especially essential if you are teaching a [small class size](#).

The game is excellent for practicing speaking skills, though make sure you save a time for after the game to comment on any mistakes students may have made during the game. (I generally like to reserve this for after the game, so you don't disrupt their fluency by correcting them as they speak).

With older groups you can have some real fun and you might be surprised what you'll learn about some of your students when playing this particular EFL game.

- **Why use it?** Ice-breaker; Speaking skills
- **Who it's best for:** Appropriate for all levels and ages but best with older groups

How to play:

- Write 3 statements about yourself on the board, two of which should be lies and one which should be true.
- Allow your students to ask you questions about each statement and then guess which one is the truth. You might want to practice your poker face before starting this game!
- If they guess correctly then they win.
- **Extension:** Give students time to write their own two truths and one lie.
- Pair them up and have them play again, this time with their list, with their new partner. If you want to really extend the game and give students even more time to practice their speaking/listening skills, rotate partners every five minutes.
- Bring the whole class back together and have students announce one new thing they learned about another student as a recap.

3. Simon Says

This is an excellent game for [young learners](#). Whether you're waking them up on a Monday morning or sending them home on a Friday afternoon, this one is bound to get them excited and wanting more. The only danger I have found with this game is that students never want to stop playing it.

- **Why use it?** Listening comprehension; Vocabulary; Warming up/winding down class
- **Who it's best for:** Young learners

How to Play:

- Stand in front of the class (you are Simon for the duration of this game).
- Do an action and say Simon Says [action]. The students must copy what you do.
- Repeat this process choosing different actions - you can be as silly as you like and the sillier you are the more the children will love you for it.
- Then do an action but this time say only the action and omit 'Simon Says'. Whoever does the action this time is out and must sit down.
- The winner is the last student standing.
- To make it harder, speed up the actions. Reward children for good behavior by allowing them to play the part of Simon.

4. Word Jumble Race

This is a great game to encourage team work and bring a sense of competition to the classroom. No matter how old we are, we all love a good competition and this game works wonders with all age groups. It is perfect for practicing tenses, word order, reading & writing skills and grammar.

- **Why use it?** Grammar; Word Order; Spelling; Writing Skills
- **Who it's best for:** Adaptable to all levels/ages

How to play:

This game requires some planning before the lesson.

- Write out a number of sentences, using different colors for each sentence. I suggest having 3-5 sentences for each team.
- Cut up the sentences so you have a handful of words.
- Put each sentence into hats, cups or any objects you can find, keeping each separate.
- Split your class into teams of 2, 3, or 4. You can have as many teams as you want but remember to have enough sentences to go around.
- Teams must now put their sentences in the correct order.
- The winning team is the first team to have all sentences correctly ordered.

5. Hangman

This classic game is a favorite for all students but it can get boring quite quickly. This game is best used for 5 minutes at the start to warm the class up or 5 minutes at the end if you've got some time left over. It works no matter how many students are in the class.

- **Why use it?** Warming up / winding down class
- **Who it's best for:** Young learners

How to play:

In case you've never played, here's a quick rundown.

- Think of a word and write the number of letters on the board using dashes to show many letters there are.
- Ask students to suggest a letter. If it appears in the word, write it in all of the correct spaces. If the letter does not appear in the word, write it off to the side and begin drawing the image of a hanging man.
- Continue until the students guess the word correctly (they win) or you complete the diagram (you win).

6. Pictionary

This is another game that works well with any age group; children love it because they can get creative in the classroom, teenagers love it because it doesn't feel like they're learning, and adults love it because it's a break from the monotony of learning a new language - even though they'll be learning as they play.

Pictionary can help students practice their vocabulary and it tests to see if they're remembering the words you've been teaching.

- **Why use it?** Vocabulary
- **Who it's best for:** All ages; best with young learners

How to play:

- Before the class starts, prepare a bunch of words and put them in a bag.
- Split the class into teams of 2 and draw a line down the middle of the board.
- Give one team member from each team a pen and ask them to choose a word from the bag.
- Tell the students to draw the word as a picture on the board and encourage their team to guess the word.
- The first team to shout the correct answer gets a point.
- The student who has completed drawing should then nominate someone else to draw for their team.
- Repeat this until all the words are gone - make sure you have enough words that each student gets to draw at least once!

7. The Mime

Miming is an excellent way for students to practice their tenses and their verbs. It's also great for teachers with [minimal resources](#) or planning time, or teachers who want to break up a longer lesson with something more interactive. It's adaptable to almost any language point that you might be focusing on.

This game works with any age group, although you will find that adults tire of this far quicker than children. To keep them engaged, relate what they will be miming to your groups' personal interests as best as possible.

- **Why use it?** Vocabulary; Speaking
- **Who it's best for:** All ages; best with young learners

How to play:

- Before the class, write out some actions - like washing the dishes - and put them in a bag.
- Split the class into two teams.
- Bring one student from each team to the front of the class and one of them choose an action from the bag.
- Have both students mime the action to their team.
- The first team to shout the correct answer wins a point.
- Repeat this until all students have mimed at least one action.

8. Hot Seat

This is one of my students' favorite games and is always at the top of the list when I ask them what they want to play. I have never used this while [teaching ESL to adults](#), but I imagine it would work well.

Hot Seat allows students to build their vocabulary and encourages competition in the classroom. They are also able to practice their speaking and listening skills and it can be used for any level of learner.

- **Why use it?** Vocabulary; Speaking and Listening
- **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

How to play:

- Split the class into 2 teams, or more if you have a large class.
- Elect one person from each team to sit in the Hot Seat, facing the classroom with the board behind them.
- Write a word on the board. One of the team members of the student in the hot seat must help the student guess the word by describing it. They have a limited amount of time and cannot say, spell or draw the word.
- Continue until each team member has described a word to the student in the Hot Seat.

9. Where Shall I Go?

This game is used to test prepositions of movement and should be played after this subject has been taught in the classroom. This game is so much fun but it can be a little bit dangerous since you'll be having one student in each pair be blindfolded while the other directs them. So make sure to keep *your* eyes open!

It is also excellent for the adult EFL classroom, or if you're [teaching teenagers](#).

- **Why use it?** Prepositions; Speaking and Listening
- **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

How to play:

- Before the students arrive, turn your classroom into a maze by rearranging it. It's great if you can do this outside, but otherwise push tables and chairs together and move furniture to make your maze.
- When your students arrive, put them in pairs outside the classroom. Blindfold one student from each pair.
- Allow pairs to enter the classroom one at a time; the blindfolded student should be led through the maze by their partner. The students must use directions such as step over, go under, go up, and go down to lead their partner to the end of the maze.

10. What's My Problem?

This is a brilliant EFL game to practice giving advice. It should be played after the 'giving advice' vocabulary lesson has taken place. It is a great way for students to see what they have remembered and what needs reviewing. This game works well with any age group, just adapt it to fit the age you're working with.

- **Why use it?** Speaking and Listening; Giving Advice
- **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

How to play:

- Write ailments or problems related to your most recent lesson on post-it notes and stick one post-it note on each student's back.
- The students must mingle and ask for advice from other students to solve their problem.
- Students should be able to guess their problem based on the advice they get from their peers.
- Use more complicated or obscure problems to make the game more interesting for older students. For lower levels and younger students, announce a category or reference a recent lesson, like "Health", to help them along.

These games will keep your students engaged and happy as they learn! Remember, these are just ten on the hundreds of different EFL games that you can play with your students. As you get more confident in the classroom, you can start putting your own spin on games and eventually make up your own.

Whatever the age of your students, they're guaranteed to love playing EFL games in the classroom. An EFL classroom should be fun, active and challenging and these games are sure to get you heading in the right direction.

PART VI: THIRTEEN ESL SPEAKING ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE ADULT STUDENTS LOVE TO TALK

[Younger ESL students](#) know what's up. They treat being in ESL class like being on the playground.

Got a couple of bumps and bruises on the jungle gym? Brush yourself off and keep [playing](#), kid.

Made a few [English mistakes](#)? [Laugh it off](#) and [keep chattering away](#).

And that's how it should be! ESL class is the perfect place to make English mistakes.

That being said, [speaking out loud](#) in front of other people—especially in a second language—can be nerve-racking for anyone. Youngsters are often less inhibited than adults, so when [teaching English speaking lessons to adults](#), there are some things that we need to bear in mind.

1. Adults, [from any cultural background](#), still like to have “fun,” but their idea of what's fun may be different from yours.
2. Adults are likely to be more sensitive to the need for dignity, and won't want to “lose face” in front of others.

Those are a couple of big ones, but there's still more. Keep reading to find out all you need to know about teaching speaking lessons to your adult ESL students.

Download: This blog post is available as a convenient and portable PDF that you can take anywhere. [Click here to get a copy. \(Download\)](#)

Important Considerations for Teaching Adult ESL Students

If you're teaching a class overseas (rather than a class with mixed nationalities in your home country), you need to be aware of local sensitivities, especially to appropriateness in mixed gender situations.

- While your school may have considered it acceptable to have men and women learning in the same room, you should notice if students have a strong tendency to sit separately based on gender. When you indiscriminately ask them to pair off, you may observe signs of discomfort or even distress in some students.
- Sometimes you may notice that the class is silent and attentive when a male student is talking, but students fidget and become talkative when a female student takes her turn at the front.

What can you do about it?

- If they have sufficient language skills, you could open up a class discussion about it.
- Be flexible when arranging the class, without necessarily letting them become lazy and work with their same favorite partners every time.

There are a few other things to consider about teaching ESL to adult students:

- Just because they're of a mature age doesn't mean that they necessarily have advanced language skills.

- If they're struggling, it may mean that they've forgotten language lessons from earlier school days—we refer to students who have studied English before and later forgotten “false beginners.”
- Try not to always link reading skills too closely to speaking skills, because they may be having difficulties with the reading.
 - They may actually be illiterate (especially if they're refugees).
 - They may be literate in a different script but are struggling with English script.
 - They may have a difficulty such as dyslexia.

No matter the unique challenges facing each adult ESL student, with the right motivation, encouragement and direction they can still learn to improve their English speaking skills.

Strategies for Getting Adult ESL Students to Speak

Students need to speak out loud by themselves and not just follow along in their heads while someone else speaks. It isn't good enough for them to only mumble along with the crowd as in a drilling exercise.

Here are some possible **speaking opportunities** that you can provide your students:

- Stand up in front of the class and **speak**. (This is good practice for the speaking part of exams such as IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC.)
- Stand up in front of the class with a **partner** and present something together.
- Be part of a group presenting a **drama** or role-play in front of the class.
- Take part in a whole class discussion or **debate**. (Make sure everyone participates. Often the quieter students will sit back and not participate in this.)
- Be involved in **pair work** where every student must talk with a partner.
- Be involved in **small group** discussions where individual students are less likely to get left out.

It's also important to **lay the groundwork** outside of dedicated speaking activities. While young students are often comfortable diving straight into new tasks, adults may want to see it done first and mentally prepare.

[FluentU](#) is a helpful tool for this purpose—it provides authentic English videos that've been transformed into level-appropriate language lessons.

FluentU has everything from news clips, to music videos, to inspiring talks and more, all organized from beginner to advanced. Each video comes with **interactive captions** that students can click for instant definitions and pronunciations, plus flashcards and exercises to help with retention. As an educator, you'll love the **built-in curriculum building and progress tracking tools**.

[It's a fun way for students to actively build their English skills while absorbing native-sounding speech.](#) You can use it in-class or, if students have access to mobile devices outside of the classroom, they can take their practice on the go.

SPEAKING ACTIVITIES FOR ADULTS

1. Short Talks

Create a stack of topic cards for your students, so that each student will have their own card. Each student draws their card, and then you assign them a time limit—this limit may be one minute initially, or maybe three minutes when they have had practice. This is the amount of time that they'll have to speak about their given topic.

Now give the students a good chunk of time to gather their thoughts. You may want to give them anywhere from 5 minutes to half an hour for this preparation stage. You can let them write down three to five sentences on a flashcard to remind them of the direction they'll take in the course of their talk.

To keep listening students focused you could create an instant “Bingo” game. The class is told the topic and asked to write down five words which they might expect to hear (other than common words such as articles, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs). They listen for those words, crossing them off as they hear them and politely raising a hand if they hear all five.

2. Show and Tell

Students can be asked to bring to school an object to show and tell about. This is lots of fun because students will often bring in something that's meaningful to them or which gives them pride. That means they'll have plenty to talk about! Encourage students to ask questions about each other's objects.

Instead of having students bring their own objects, you could provide an object of your own and ask them to try to explain what they think it is and what its purpose is. Another option is to bring in pictures for them to talk about. This could be discussed with a partner or in a group, before presenting ideas in front of the whole class.

Generate a stronger discussion and keep things flowing by asking students open-ended questions.

3. PechaKucha

If your students have laptops (or a computer lab they can use) and are reasonably familiar with presentation software (such as PowerPoint), then all that's left to acquire for this activity is access to an LCD projector.

Students can have a lot of fun speaking while giving a presentation to the class. Using projected images helps to distract some attention away from the speaker and can be helpful for shy students.

The [“PechaKucha” style of presentation](#)* can give added interest with each student being allowed to show 20 slides only for 20 seconds each (the timing being controlled by the software so that the slides change automatically) or whatever time limit you choose. You could make it 10 slides for 15 seconds each, for example.

You could also add rules such as “no more than 3 words on each slide” (or “no words”) so that students must really talk and not just read the slides. They need to be given a good amount of time, either at home or in class, to prepare themselves and practice their timing. It can also be prepared and presented in pairs, with each partner speaking for half of the slides.

**PechaKucha originated in Tokyo (in 2003). The name means “chitchat.”*

“Nowadays held in many cities around the world, PechaKucha Nights are informal and fun gatherings where creative people get together and share their ideas, works, thoughts, holiday snaps—just about anything, really.”—[the PechaKucha 20×20 format](#).

4. Bingo

Many people think of this game as a listening activity, but it can very quickly become a speaking activity.

There are a number of [ESL websites](#) that will allow you to quickly create a set of Bingo cards containing up to 25 words, phrases or even whole sentences. They’ll allow you to make as many unique cards as you need to distribute a different card to each student in class. Each card can contain the same set of words arranged differently, or you can choose to have more or less than 25 items involved.

Rather than having students mark up their cards, you can give them markers (such as stones or sunflower seeds) to place on each square as they recognize it. This way the markers can be removed and the game can be repeated.

For the first round, the teacher should “call” the game. The first student to get five markers in a row in any direction shouts out “Bingo!” Then you should have this student read out every item in their winning row.

The winner is congratulated and then rewarded by becoming the next Caller. This is a great speaking opportunity. Everyone removes their markers and the game starts again. Every expression that’s called tends to be repeated quietly by everyone in the room, and by the end of a session everyone can say all of the expressions on the card.

5. Two Texts

This challenging task is great for more capable students and it involves reading. Having texts in front of them can make adult students feel more supported.

Choose two short texts and print them out. Print enough of each text for half of the class. Create a list of simple questions for each text and print out the same quantity.

Divide the class into two groups and hand out the texts. Hang onto the question sheets for later. One group gets one text, the second group gets the other text. The texts can be about related topics (or not).

Group members then read their texts and are free to talk about them within their group, making sure they all understand everything. After 5 minutes or so, take the papers away.

- Each student is paired with someone from the other group. Each student must tell their partner everything they learned from their text. Then they must listen to (and remember) what the other student tells them about their group’s text.
- Students return to their original groups and are given a list of questions about their original text.
- Students are paired again, this time with a *different* person from the other group. Each student must test their partner using the questions about the text which their partner never read and was only told about, and likewise answer questions about the text they were told about.

Another day use two different texts and try this activity again. Students do remarkably better the second time!

6. Running Dictation

This useful activity requires students to use all four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—and if carefully planned and well-controlled can cause both great excitement and exceptional learning.

Pair students up. Choose who will run and who will write. (At a later stage they could swap tasks.)

Print out some short texts (related to what you're studying) and stick them on a wall away from the desks. You should stick them somewhere out of sight from where the students sit, such as out in the corridor.

There could be several numbered texts, and the students could be asked to collect two or three each. The texts could include blanks which they need to fill later, or they could be asked to put them in order. There are many possibilities here!

The running students run (or power-walk) to their assigned texts, read, remember as much as they can and then return to dictate the text to the writing student. Then they run again. The first pair to finish writing the complete, correct texts wins.

Be careful that you **do not**:

- Let students use their phone cameras to “remember” the text.
- Let “running” students write—they *can* spell words out and tell their partner when they're wrong.
- Let “writing” students go and look at the text (or let “running” students bring it to them).

7. Surveys and Interviews

Becoming competent at asking and answering questions is invaluable in language learning.

In the simplest form of classroom survey practice the teacher hands out ready-made questions—maybe 3 for each student—around a topic that is being studied.

For example, let's say the topic is food. Each student could be given the same questions, or there could be several different sets of questions such as questions about favorite foods, fast foods, breakfasts, restaurants, ethnic foods, home-style cooking, etc.

Then each student partners with several others (however many the teacher requires), one-by-one and asks them the questions on the paper. In each interaction, the student asking the questions will note down the responses from their peers.

At the end of the session students may be asked to stand up and summarize what they found out from their survey.

8. Taboo

In this game, one player has a card listing four words:

- The first word is the secret word. The aim of the game is to get another player to say this word. The student with the card will need to describe this word until another student figures out what the secret word is.

- The other three words are the most obvious words that you might use to explain the secret word. They are all “taboo” and cannot be used in the student’s description of the secret word.

This game can be played between two teams. It can also be played between partners.

You can create your own sets of words based on what you’ve been studying, or you can find sets in your textbook and on the Internet.

9. Discuss and Debate

More mature students can discuss and debate issues with a partner. They can even be told which side of the argument they should each try to promote. This could be a precursor to a full-blown classroom debate. Working with a partner or small group first gives them an opportunity to develop and practice the necessary vocabulary to speak confidently in a larger forum.

10. I Like People

Adults do like to have fun, as long as they aren’t made to feel or look stupid. This is a brilliant game for helping them think quickly and speak more fluent English (rather than trying to translate from their native tongue).

1. Students sit on chairs in a circle, leaving a space in the circle for the teacher to stand.
2. First, they’re asked to listen to statements that the teacher makes and stand if it applies to them, such as: “I like people who are wearing black shoes,” “I like people who have long hair,” etc.
3. Next, the teacher asks standing students to change places with someone else who’s standing.
4. Now it becomes a game. The teacher makes a statement, students referred to must stand and quickly swap places. When the students move around, the teacher quickly sits in someone’s spot, forcing them to become the teacher.
5. The students quickly get into the swing of this game. Generally they’ll quickly notice a “cheating” classmate who hasn’t stood up when they should have, and they’ll also eagerly encourage a shy student who finds himself standing in the gap with no ideas.

This game has no natural ending, so keep an eye on the mood of the students as they play. They may start to run out of ideas, making the game lag. Quickly stand and place yourself back into the teacher position and debrief (talk with them about how they felt about the game).

11. Sentence Auction

Create a list of sentences, some correct and some with errors.

- The errors should be related to a language topic you’re teaching or reviewing (e.g. articles, tenses or pronouns).
- The number of sentences will depend on your students’ abilities. 20 is a good number for intermediate students. If you have too few sentences then it will be harder to balance the correct and incorrect.
- The ratio of correct and incorrect is up to you, but it’s a good idea to have more than 50% correct.

Next to the list of sentences draw three columns: Bid, win, lose.

You can set a limit for how much (imaginary) money they have to spend, or just let them have as much as they want.

They need to discuss (in English) and decide whether any sentence is 100% reliable, in which case they can bid 100 dollars (or whatever unit you choose). If they're totally sure that it's incorrect (and they rarely are) they can put a "0" bid. If they're unsure, they can bid 20, 30, 40, based on how likely it is to be correct. (Having a limit on their total bid will make them decide more carefully.)

- When all of their bids are written in, it's often a good idea to get pairs to swap their papers with other pairs for marking.
- Go through the sentences, discussing which are correct and why. Get individual students to explain what's right, what's wrong and why.
- For correct sentences, the bid amount is written in the "win" column. For incorrect sentences, it's written in the "lose" column.
- Both columns are totaled, and the "lose" total is subtracted from the "win" total.
- Papers are returned, and partners discuss (in English) how their bidding went.

This activity is most effective when the students work together as partners, reading and discussing the correctness of sentences. Students are encouraged to use English to discuss their strategies with their partner.

12. Alibi

This well-known ESL game is great speaking practice for adults. The teacher tells the class that a particular crime has been committed. For fun, make it locally specific. For example:

"Last Friday night, sometime between ___ and ___, someone broke into the ___ Bank on ___ Street."

Depending on the size of your class, pick several students as "Suspects." The "Police" can work in groups of 2-4, and you need one Suspect for each police group. So, for example, in a class of 20 you could choose 4 Suspects and then have 4 groups of 4 Police for questioning.

Tell the class: *"___, ___, ___ and ___ were seen near the scene of the crime, and the police would like to question them."*

The Suspects go outside or to another room to prepare their story. They need to decide *all* of the details about where they were during the time of the crime. For example: If they were at a restaurant, what did they eat? What did it cost? Who arrived first?

1. The Police spend some time preparing their questions.
2. The Suspects are called back in and go individually to each police group. They're questioned for a few minutes, and then each one moves on to the next group.
3. The Police decide whether their answers match enough for them to have a reasonable Alibi. (Maybe up to 5 mistakes is reasonable.)

13. Typhoon

Explain to students that this game is named after the strong wind that blows everything away. It can be played with a class as small as 3, but it also works with large classes. It's great for reviewing speaking topics.

1. On the board draw a grid of boxes—a 6 x 6 grid works well and can take about 45 minutes to complete, but you may vary this once you've played a few times. You'll just want to choose the size depending on how much time you have. Mark one axis with numbers, the other with letters. (Or use vocabulary words like adjectives on one and nouns on the other.)
2. On a piece of paper or in a notebook (out of sight) draw the same grid. On your grid, fill in scores in all of the boxes. Most of them should be numbers, and others will be letters. It doesn't matter which numbers you choose, but it's fun to have some small ones (1, 2, 3, etc.) and some very big ones (500, 1000, etc.). About one in four boxes should have the letter "T" for "Typhoon."
3. Put the students into teams—at least 3 teams—and mark a place on the board to record each team's score.
4. Ask questions or give speaking tasks to each team in turn. If they answer correctly, they then "choose a box" using the grid labels. The teacher checks the secret grid, and writes the score into the grid on the board. This score also goes into the team's score box.
5. If the chosen box contains a number, the scores simply add up. But if the box contains a "T," the team then chooses which other team's score they want to "blow away" back to zero.

Notes on Typhoon:

- If you run out of time but the game isn't finished, declare a "no questions, just choose" period to fill the rest of the grid and find out who wins.
- Students love this game, so you can spice it up by adding different symbols in some of the boxes. I use:
 - **Swap:** They must swap their score with another team's score, even if they're winning.
 - **S:** Steal. They can steal a score instead of just blowing it away.
 - **D:** Double. They double their own score.
- After a couple of times playing this game, students can easily run it themselves. This provides even more opportunities to speak. One student (or a pair) could handle the grid, another could handle the score board, others can make or choose questions or tasks and someone can be Game Presenter.

After the Speaking Activity

If you run your speaking activity well, the students will often get really involved in it. They may well need to be "debriefed" afterwards before they leave the classroom. This helps them get out residual excitement and reinforce the lessons they learned.

Always allow a few minutes of class time to talk about the activity, what they liked about it (or hated), how it made them feel and what they think they've learned.

Of course, all of this involves more worthwhile speaking time!

SOURCES

The materials contained in this document were collected from the following websites:

<https://www.rubicon.com/classroom-games-without-technology/>

<https://www.rubicon.com/teaching-tech-free-classroom-games/>

<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator/foreign-language-vocabulary-games/>

<https://www.gooverseas.com/blog/10-best-games-esl-teachers>

<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/esl-speaking-activities-for-adults/>