

English teaching games and activities

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Synopsis: The following is a sample list of ideas for games and activities in an ESL/EFL teaching environment. They are to promote practice in listening, speaking, vocabulary, dictation, and grammar.

Music

- Write new songs; change lyrics or substitute words.
- Play some English songs from CD and sing along; encourage the use of body gestures.
- Write lyrics on board or pass out lyrics with translations.
- ABC's: sing the letters in a chain.
- Song contest.

Word Games

- *Spelling* ("How to do you spell...?"); teams (+/- points)
- *Scrambler*: scramble the letters on board and make a word. Or scramble a list of words on board and make a sentence. First person/team to identify word or sentence earns a point.
- *Chain spelling*: (1) In a group each person says a letter; go around until the word is spelled. (2) One person utters a word; next student uses the last letter of the previous word to make another word. Continue in a chain.
- *Brainstorming*: in teams, write as many words as possible for a given subject (e.g. all the supermarket words), or assign a letter to each team and have them write as many words as possible starting with that letter; should be timed.
- *Word ↔ Picture*: find a list of numbered pictures with corresponding words (such as one found in a textbook). Have students cover the words. Instructor quickly says a number and the first team to raise hands and say the correct word earns a point. The game could also be done in reverse with the instructor saying the words and the students calling out the numbered pictures.
- *Word ↔ Definition*: instructor says a definition of a word; first student to raise his hand and say the corresponding word earns a point. Additional points could be earned for spelling.

Dictation Games

- *Bingo*: instructor shows a flashcard picture and students must find the corresponding word on bingo sheet and cross it out; effective with teams. *Variations*: listen to English word from instructor and cross out corresponding native word (language 1) on bingo sheet, or listen to native word and cross out corresponding English word; or just listen to word and cross out picture on bingo sheet.
- *Speed dictation*: two players from each team go to the board: they listen to a word (or letter) and write. Winner is one that finishes writing *correctly* first and earns a point for that team.
- *Team dictation*: give two sheets of dictation paper, one for team A, another for team B. Team B turns around so as to not see the board. Then instructor chooses a phrase/sentence (such as from a lesson dialogue) and writes it on board. The first student from team A must utter the sentence clearly only once to a student across from him in team B who must write it. Instructor then chooses another sentence and writes it on board. The second student from team A must

utter it to the next student in team B to write. Continue until all the students in team A have gone through this process; then have team B hand in their paper for the instructor to evaluate. (Meanwhile, team B can review the sentences on the board and find their mistakes). Instructor assigns points to team B based on their writing and returns their paper. He then erases the sentences on board and asks team A to turn around while team B is facing forward. The game is resumed, but this time, team B starts off and team A writes a different set of sentences. In each round, sentences can be of increasing length for greater challenge. The game should be timed (e.g., 5-10 seconds for writing). One point for writing all the words from the original sentence; two points for writing all of the words AND having correct spelling. No points for illegible handwriting. (*Problem*: some students may be shy speakers, making it difficult for some students to write and giving an unfair advantage to a team. To counter this, points could be assigned to the whole class rather than to individual teams. Once the whole class earns a certain number of points, they may receive a special prize).

Flashcard games

- Look at flashcard picture and make a sentence or question about it, or listen to the question about picture and answer it; look at picture and say corresponding word; look at word and define (perhaps with body language), translate, or draw a picture. Raise hands or stand up quickly to say answer. (Give flashcards to student/team for points).

Simon Says

- Variations involving lesson topics (e.g. commands, instructions, a series of steps like clap your hands, hug your partner, jump 2 x and clap, et.).

Memory games

- Memorize one or more sentences from passage (in teams or individually). One point for saying correct line. *Variation*: have each team memorize the same passage (such as 3-4 lines); allow a few minutes for memorization. Then each team stands up. The first team to go must say the first word of the passage. If it's correct, that team remains standing, otherwise, sits down. Then the next team must say the second word of the passage (as long as the first word was correctly uttered by the first team). Continue in a chain until the last team remains standing which is the winner. (Each team should be given 3-5 seconds to think about the word before saying it. Only one person from the team should call out the answer, but taking turns in every round).
- *Reading and repeating*: have students turn their backs to the board. Instructor chooses a phrase or sentence (such as from a reading passage) and writes it on board. Then he asks students to turn around and look at what is written on board. He gives them 3-5 seconds before he erases it. The first student/team to raise hands and correctly utters what was written on board earns a point. *Optional*: gradually increase the length of the phrase or sentence in each round.
- *Listening and repeating*: (1) Whisper a sentence to one student and have him/her repeat it to the next student and so on in a chain. After each round, the sentences can get longer and longer. (2) Instructor selects sentences that are of equal length (preferably ones chosen from a lesson or reading passage which students are familiar with). Randomly, he picks a sentence from the list and utters it only once. A student from a team must then repeat what the instructor just said (but given several seconds to think about it before speaking), but no writing is permitted. One point for accurately recounting all of the words, otherwise, no points. The process is repeated with another team but instructor picks a different sentence from the same list. For more challenge, the instructor can choose a different list of sentences that are of greater length (while being mindful of the type of vocabulary used).

Guessing Games

- *Pictionary*: draw a picture, guess an animal, and ask questions (e.g. Does it have...? Is it a..?).
- *20 questions*: think of a famous person. Guess person by asking 20 yes/no questions or less.
- Hide an object in class: ask questions by using correct prepositions (e.g. Is it under the...? Is it next to the...?).
- From a list of common nouns, randomly pick one and have a student from one team act it out while the other team tries to guess what it is (by asking questions). Action verbs in place of common nouns could also work.
- Give two copies of a picture for each pair of students. Have each student cross out at least three items in their picture. They then try to guess what's missing in their partner's picture by asking questions. *Optional*: students report to the class about the contents of their picture.

Jeopardy (modified)

- Select teams. Choose from 3-4 categories: e.g., *reading comp, true/false, spelling/definition, multiple choice*. Create a point system (e.g., some categories may be more difficult and therefore have more points, or to simplify it, only one point for each category). Create flashcards: one side question, other side answer. Decide which team goes first. The first team selects a category and listens to the question about it. They are given several seconds to think about it before answering it; if their answer is correct they earn a point (or points). Then the next team is given the chance to pick a category, answer a question, and so on. Do not have them pick the same category for every round to promote challenge. This game may be suitable for advanced students and could supplement reviewing activities. [*Optional*: have teams to raise their hands instead to answer questions. First team to raise their hand and answer the question correctly earns a point, otherwise, minus points (to discourage hastiness). If the answer is correct, that team can then pick another category, but different from before, and continue the game process. *Problem*: one team may be picking all the categories and answering all the questions while shy ones are left out; the method outlined earlier may potentially avoid this problem].

Listening and Speaking Activities

- Listen to a question, answer using a sentence; or listen to answer and say it's true/false.
- Choose a conversational topic and frame the questions for students (such as by displaying reference words on board): ask questions about topic in a group or with a partner to promote a discussion.
- Instructor utters a model sentence from a lesson (or from a reading passage). A student must then change a word (such as a noun, adjective, verb) and make a new sentence. If this is too easy, change two words, three words... *Variation*: instructor utters a model phrase, students must generate new sentences based on it.
- Listen to a grammatically false sentence: change it and say the correct form. Or, listen to a false sentence (but grammatically correct) and make it true.
- Listen to a sentence from a reading passage. Identify the key word and spell it out.
- Listen to an answer; make a suitable question. E.g., *instructor*: "There are eleven..." *student*: "How many...?"
- Pick a conversational topic for the whole class: with a partner or group, they quickly brainstorm all the questions about the topic in a given time frame, e.g., 30 seconds. They then record at least 5 of their best questions in writing. Afterwards, they present the questions to each other. *Optional*: they make any changes to their questions (with instructor guidance), rewrite them (using good handwriting) and pass them to another group to ask and answer. Encourage

groups to not limit themselves to the questions on paper. (Although this exercise could supplement writing activities, the primary focus here should be on speaking fluency).

- Pick a conversational topic: with a partner, discuss it as long as possible. The loser is first person who pauses, say, for more than 2 seconds. *Optional*: The winner of each group is selected to compete with one another. This continues until the final winner in the final round is declared.
- Story chain: in a circle, each person contributes to a story by inventing a new line. (The story could also be an extension of an existing story).

Grammar Activities

- *Prepositions*: “Where is...?” Answer using a sentence with correct preposition.
- *Verb tennis*: e.g., one student from a team says the verb in present tense, then another student from another team says it in the past tense. Continue serving the verbs back and forth.
- *Q & A*: prepare a list of question structures that have been already studied. Present them on board and number them. Instructor randomly says an answer that suits one of the question structures, e.g., “It is on the table.” The students must then decide which question structure the answer is best suited for; in this case, “Where is + article + noun?” They then try to make a question using that form. One point for choosing the correct structure, another for making a proper question. Should be timed and done individually or in teams. *Variation*: Prepare a deck of cards with various question models which students are familiar with. Arrange students in a circle. Instructor shows the top card to the first student. He has 3-5 seconds to think about the model before making a suitable question with it. He asks the question to the student next to him who must give an appropriate response. Instructor assigns one point for a well-formed question, another for a well-formed answer (i.e., an appropriate sentence). Instructor then picks the next card from the deck and repeats the process with the second student. Continue going around in a circle while each student is presented with a different question model. [*Method for assigning points*: If student A generated a well-formed question and student B generated a well-formed response, then instructor places the card halfway between them which means that both students have earned a point. However, if student A gave a well-formed question, but student B did not give a well-formed answer, then give the card to student A only. If student A did not make a proper question using the model presented to him or did not do so in time, then instructor places the card in a discard pile which may be used later for review].

Matching

- Prepare a deck of cards with one half consisting of questions and the other half consisting of answers that match the questions. Pass out 3-5 cards to each player. They must ask and answer one another the questions presented on their cards. If student A asks a question to student B and student B has a card with a suitable answer, then student B must hand that card over to student A. The first player to finish collecting and matching his cards wins. (*Note*: Try to prevent students from simply exchanging the cards with one another without ever speaking. In addition, if a student does not have the card with an answer that matches the question that is asked of him, encourage the student to provide his own answer anyway).

Others

- Tongue Twisters
- Speed reading
- Speech contest
- Comic strips
- Role-play

