

Module 11 – Games in the Classroom

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I. Why games can be helpful

1. Reasons to use games

Most learners enjoy language games. They can vastly help with recycling and assimilating language – and can be fun, competitive, challenging or relaxing.

You can find a huge variety of ideas for games on EFL/ESL internet sites and in large bookshops.

In this module you will learn about some popular games and how to use them in class.

One common misconception is that if we are having fun and laughing, then we are not really learning. This is very far from the truth - in fact research suggests that one of the best learning environments is one of enjoyment.

Here are some reasons to use games in the classroom:

- They are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- They are motivating and challenging.
- They help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- They provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
- They encourage students to interact and communicate.
- They create a meaningful context for language use.

2. Tips for using games

Before you decide what games to adapt for your classroom purposes, you will need to take certain factors into consideration. Take a look at these 10 top tips that will help you choose games that are directly relevant to your students.

1. Think about how the game will generate useful and relevant language.
2. Find a way to review and practise language points students have already learned.
3. Choose a game that works on their desired skill areas.
4. Consider your students' age, level and cultural background.
5. Assess how well your students interact with you and one another.
6. Choose a game that is challenging but not too difficult.
7. Choose a game that will create cooperation and a sense of community in the classroom.
8. Consider the practical issues like the size of your classroom.
9. Consider what resources and materials you have on hand.
10. Assess when to use a game in a lesson. For example, some games are good for starting a lesson while others work better as review activities.

When using games in the language classroom:

1. Give instructions before asking students to move from their seats.
2. Make your instructions simple and clear. Give examples where possible.
3. Avoid saying 'Do you understand?' Remember that students are often reluctant to admit when they aren't certain how to do something. Instead ask students if they would like you to repeat your instructions. You can also ask your students to repeat or paraphrase your instructions.
4. Organise a suitable seating arrangement for the game.
5. Monitor the game carefully and include feedback on the game either afterwards or at the beginning of the next lesson.
6. Keep an eye on the time and facilitate your games if they slow down too much.
7. Get involved, your class will enjoy it, but don't overshadow your students.
8. Always vary teams and consider random selections so teams don't always end up the same.

Some games can be used for language teaching as they are, some games need to be adapted, and some are simply unsuitable for the language classroom.

Variations in your teaching environment, resources, and above all your students necessitate a very flexible attitude to your classroom games. Change the rules if necessary – but above all, ensure that language practice is your focus - and most importantly that all the players are having fun!

II. Some examples of popular games

Alibi is a fantastic game for the language classroom which does not need to be adapted. It is good for more complex language teaching and is particularly useful for practising past tenses and reported speech.

This is how alibi is played.

The teacher relates a crime story. For example, last week you and another teacher were kidnapped and your kidnappers didn't release you for three days.

You've returned to work but disaster – your boss doesn't believe you, and is going to interview you and the other teacher separately, to check if your stories add up.

Put your students into pairs. Some pairs will be bosses and others teachers.

Give everyone 10-15 minutes. The bosses must write as many detailed questions as possible, and the teachers have to work out their story. It is best to first brainstorm with the class what they could include in the story and come up with some example questions before having them get to work.

When they are finished, one member of a boss pair takes one member of a teacher pair and asks all their questions. The other boss does the same with the other teacher.

The bosses then come back together and try to find a contradiction in the teachers' stories. Does the story hold water?

Battleships can be used in children's classes by putting grammar along the top and side of the board so that students have to form a sentence to choose a square. The strategy of the game remains but with a language focus.

Bingo can be used as it is to practise numbers. You can adapt the game to focus on larger numbers or pronunciation problems like the difference between '13' and '30'. Or you can use vocabulary; say the word and the students have to cover the correct picture. It can be adapted to any language item and it's a great way to finish off a lesson, especially with children.

Charades can be adapted well for classroom use. In its original format it is used to guess the titles of books, films and TV shows. The problem with this is that many students in other countries will be unfamiliar with them or know them by a different title. What you can do instead is to decide in advance what culturally-specific or internationally known items to use, and write these on slips of paper which students choose at random. For more of a language focus, you may wish to jot down verbs or occupations which students have to mime.

Dominoes is good for practising phrasal verbs, verb collocations and prefixes & suffixes. Adapt the pieces so that they match up (e.g. take + out, lay + down, get + on) so the students have to match them in the game.

Hangman is an excellent way to work on letters and spelling. It serves as a fun way to review language items and requires no preparation. For this reason it is also good for the last 5 minutes if you need a filler!

Monopoly could be useful for a lesson on money, reading cards, and using questions dealing with buying and selling. It is not very communicative though, and is too long.

Noughts and Crosses (or **Tic Tac Toe**) can be adapted easily by writing the grid up on a whiteboard and filling each square in with a modal verb, an idiom, a phrasal verb, a preposition, etc. A team has to make a correct sentence with whatever is in the square before they can claim it. Again, it is a great way of revising at the end of the week.

Pictionary is great fun in the classroom at all levels - try using it as a warmer at the beginning of the class. Split the class into teams - one player from each team comes to the front and the teacher shows them a word. They return to their team to draw the word; the first team to guess wins a point.

Scrabble is a good way to review vocabulary and practise spelling. To make it more fun, it can be played in pairs or teams. If you use the original gameboard and pieces, you will need to provide more than the normal 7 letters per player so students can easily find words. Junior Scrabble features a board with the words written on it so that the students only have to find the letters. This is handy for young learners and beginners.

Snakes and Ladders can be adapted by putting sentences in the squares, some of which are grammatically or otherwise incorrect. When the student lands in the square, they go up the ladder if they can correct it, or down the snake if they can't. It is great for end of week revision of new concepts and language items. With children you could use simple words spelt wrongly which they have to correct.

Trivial Pursuit can be adapted for the classroom by inventing your own version using facts and general knowledge you have incorporated in lessons (avoiding culturally specific questions). Use it to review different language areas and designate different categories for questions dealing with verb tenses, vocabulary, articles, plurals, spelling, etc. Coming up with all the questions takes a long time, so consider making a game that can be used again and again.

Twister may be suitable for small children's classes to practise colours and body parts.

20 Questions provides great speaking practice, especially if done in pairs. You should insist on totally accurate questions; students generally have a lot of problems with this form.

The objective of the game is to guess an animal, profession, mineral, famous person, etc. by asking no more than 20 closed (yes/no) questions (e.g. Is it a man? Is he alive? Does he live in Europe? etc).

III. A lesson plan based on a game

Sometimes you may want to build an entire lesson around a language game, so you will need to create a suitable lesson plan. Before you plan specific lesson activities remember to consider general points such as assumed knowledge or anticipated problems.

In this example plan, the teacher uses the game of 20 questions as a means of reviewing the past simple and present simple question forms with a pre-intermediate class. No new language is taught in this particular lesson but remember, games can also reinforce newly introduced language.

Pre-plan

Level :	Pre-intermediate
Age :	Teenagers
Timing :	40 mins
Objective:	To consolidate present simple and past simple questions; this is a revision lesson to prepare students for learning more complex grammar in the next class
Target language:	no new language is taught
Assumed knowledge:	closed present simple questions (am/are/is +subject + noun/adjective?; do/does + subject + verb?), closed past simple questions (was/were + subject + noun/adjective?; did + subject + verb?)

Anticipated problems:

1. some students participate in the game less than others
2. students use 'wh' questions in the game
3. students guess the people too soon so the game finishes early

Solutions:

1. ensure that the students in each team take turns asking questions
2. teacher illustrates how the game is played first by asking students questions
3. ask each team to think of one more person, and/or prepare optional activities for the end of the lesson

Preparation/aids:

1. Present simple statements (preferably funny ones)
2. Emotion flash cards

3. Action flash cards
4. Cards with time adverbs
5. Blank sheets of paper

Optional:

exercise on the present perfect vs the past simple

Stages of the lesson plan:

1) Warm-up

Elicit the word “admire”

In pairs write down the names of three people you admire the most and discuss why you admire them. Discuss as a class. S-S,T-S: 5 minutes

2) Introduction

Announce the game of 20 questions to be played later in the lesson using names of famous people. Ask if the students know the game. T-S: 1 minute

3) Drilling

Present Simple questions. Teacher gives a statement which students turn it into a question. First statements/ questions with “to be”, then with other verbs. T-S: 4 minutes

4) Plenary

Students write form on the board: “to be” questions and “do/does” questions in the present simple. S-T: 2 minutes

5) Drilling

Past Simple questions. Teacher shows an emotion card (e.g. happy man) and a card with a time word (e.g. yesterday). Students produce the question “Was he happy yesterday?” T-S: 2 minutes

6) Drilling

Past Simple questions. Teacher shows an action card (e.g. a woman shopping) and a card with a time word (e.g. Sunday). Students produce the question “Did she go shopping on Sunday?” T-S: 2 minutes

7) Plenary

Students write the form on the board: “to be” questions and “did” questions in the past simple. S-T: 2 minutes

8) Lead-in to the game

Explain/ elicit the rules of the game of 20 questions. Check understanding.

Demonstrate: Students think of a person, the teacher tries to guess who the person is by asking questions. T-S: 2 minutes

9) Game

Divide the class into two teams and play the game. Each team writes down two people’s names – one who is alive and one who is dead. Team members take turns asking questions (using the past and present tenses, respectively). In case of mistakes encourage self- and peer-correction. If any questions require the Present Perfect, correct and briefly explain/ elicit the difference between the past simple and the

present perfect (e.g. “Has he written any books?” if the person is alive vs. “Did he write any books?” if the person is dead). S-S 15 minutes

10) Follow-up Activity

Option 1: Practise the Present Perfect tense. An exercise on distinguishing between the Present Perfect and the Past Simple. T-S-T: 5 minutes

Option 2: Students discuss their opinions of the people who have been named in the game. S-T: 5 minutes