

ESL ESSENTIAL GAMES

Over 170 Fun and Engaging ESL Classroom Games for Students of All Ages

BOARD RACE

Team A

1. Play
2. Learn
3. Draw
4. Smile
5. Touch

Team B

1. Think
2. Speak
3. Spell

Team C

1. Run
2. Listen
3. Write
4. Read



ESL ESSENTIAL GAMES

THIRD EDITION

By Teach-This.com



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Notes for Teachers

The ESL Essential Games eBook

ESL Essential Games contains over 170 fun games for English teachers to use in the classroom. Many of the games can be easily adapted to cater to multiple levels. There are games for young learners, teenagers and adults. Most of the games require minimal preparation time, so they can easily be used as last-minute replacement activities or fillers. The games are also categorized to make selection easier.

These games can be used in any English course to supplement other materials. The games are flexible enough to be easily incorporated into most lessons and can be used to introduce and practice vocabulary or grammar, revise language structures, or improve core skills such as listening, pronunciation and speaking.

You can use these games as warmers at the start of a lesson, during the lesson to liven up the class and reinvigorate students, or at the end of class to finish on a positive note and round off the lesson.

The games in this eBook provide engaging and interesting ways to help students make connections between words and grammar. Making these connections helps quicken the process of language learning. These games also help to build confidence, focus attention, improve participation, and energize students. The games have been created by qualified and experienced ESL professionals and have been tested and proven in the classroom.

How to Use this eBook

Games can be easily selected by scanning through the table of contents. To help with the selection process, all games have been categorised according to a particular theme and have been arranged in alphabetical order. The table of contents shows the aim, the language skills focus and the language level for each game. Shortcut hyperlinks have also been included to provide quick and easy navigation.

Each game comes with detailed teacher's notes that provide key information such as activity types, language focus and aim, preparation requirements, and estimated time duration. The notes also include a comprehensive step-by-step procedure, making the games quick and easy to incorporate into a lesson plan. Each resource comes in a user-friendly and printable A4 PDF format.

Levelling

The contents show the following abbreviated levels in brackets:

Young learners (YL)
Elementary (A1-A2)
Pre-intermediate (A2)
Intermediate (B1)
Upper-intermediate (B2)
Any level (Any)

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Answer Games			
1. Hot Potato	To motivate students to answer questions.	Speaking	YL
2. Noughts and Crosses	To provide a fun way to go through answers to questions in class.	Speaking	A1-A2
3. Speak Button Game	To provide a fun way to go through answers to questions in class.	Speaking	Any
4. The Buzzer Game	To motivate students to answer questions.	Speaking	Any
Brainstorming Games			
5. Alphabet Brainstorm	To review vocabulary and lexical sets.	Vocabulary	Any
6. Brainstormers	To review vocabulary for various topics and categories.	Vocabulary	Any
7. Brainstorming Race	To review categories of words and their spellings.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
8. Five Things That...	To review categories of words.	Vocabulary	A2
9. Outburst	To review vocabulary for various topics and categories.	Vocabulary	A2
10. The Invention Game	To brainstorm possible uses for everyday objects using <i>can</i> and <i>could</i> .	Speaking	B1
Category Games			
11. Balloon Volleyball	To review categories of words.	Vocabulary	A1-A2
12. Board Races	To review categories of words and their spellings.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
13. Category Battleships	To find words and put them into appropriate categories.	Vocabulary	A1-A2
14. In the Circle	To review vocabulary for various topics and categories.	Vocabulary	Any
15. List of Categories	To provide teachers a list of categories that can be used for games in this eBook.	Teacher resource	Any
16. Monkey in the Middle	To say words from various categories.	Vocabulary	YL
17. One by One	To guess words from particular categories.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
18. Race to the Bottom	To say category words beginning with a particular letter.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Skill	Level
Category Games continued			
19. Scattegories	To write category words beginning with a particular letter.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
20. Seek and Destroy	To identify words according to their particular categories.	Vocabulary	Any
21. Stickmen	To list words that belong to a certain category.	Vocabulary	Any
22. Stop	To think of the least uncommon words belonging to a certain category and beginning with a particular letter.	Vocabulary	B1
23. Stop the Music Game	To review words belonging to particular categories.	Vocabulary	Any
Classic Childhood Games			
24. Cops and Robbers	To practice names of objects and the structures: <i>What have you got? I have got...</i>	Vocabulary and Speaking	A1-A2
25. I Spy	To name visible objects beginning with a certain letter.	Vocabulary	YL
26. Mr Crocodile	To review vocabulary for clothes, appearance and colours.	Vocabulary	A1-A2
27. Mr Wolf	To practice telling the time and basic numbers.	Vocabulary	YL
28. Red Light, Green Light	To review numbers, the alphabet and categories of words.	Vocabulary	YL
29. Simon Says	To practice imperatives.	Listening	A1-A2
Counting Games			
30. Fizz Buzz	To practice numbers 1 to 100.	Vocabulary and Listening	A1-A2
31. Frog Bob	To practice basic numbers.	Vocabulary	YL
32. Number Categories	To practice numbers and lexical sets	Vocabulary	Any
33. Tinglysh	To review numbers.	Vocabulary	YL
34. 7 Up	To practice numbers 1 to 7	Vocabulary	YL
Describing Games			
35. Describe it	To describe words and to guess words from another student's descriptions.	Vocabulary and Speaking	A2
36. Describing Dodgeball	To practice describing personal appearance.	Vocabulary and Speaking	A2-B1

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Describing Games continued			
37. Details	To write descriptions of visible objects using adjective-noun collocations.	Vocabulary and Writing	A2-B1
38. Felix the Cat	To think of appearance and personality adjectives beginning with a certain letter and form basic sentences.	Vocabulary and Speaking	A2
39. Hot Seats	To describe words and guess words from descriptions	Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
40. Swat	To listen to a description and match it with a word.	Vocabulary and Listening	Any
41. Teammates	To write descriptions of people and to guess the person being described.	Vocabulary and Writing	Any
42. Ten Words	To describe and guess recently studied words.	Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
Drawing Games			
43. Beetle Drive	To review parts of the body vocabulary.	Vocabulary	YL
44. Don't say a word!	To review and practice recently taught vocabulary and grammar.	Grammar and Vocabulary	Any
45. Draw the Sentence	To review and practice the present continuous tense.	Grammar	A2
46. Pictionary	To review general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
47. Quick Draw	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
48. The Drawing Game	To guess the names of famous films, TV shows, books or people.	Vocabulary	A2
49. The Picture Game	To practice prepositions of place and adjectives for people and objects	Vocabulary, Speaking and Listening	A2-B1
Drilling Activity Games			
50. Coin Races	To practice and repeat question and answer structures.	Grammar and Speaking	Any
51. Lord of the Rings	To practice and repeat question and answer structures.	Grammar and Speaking	Any
52. Three Times	To practice asking for and giving personal information.	Grammar and Speaking	YL

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
First Day of Class Games			
53. My Life in Five Sentences	To use sequence words to arrange information about a partner logically.	Writing and Speaking	A2
54. Secrets	To practice asking and answering <i>Wh</i> questions.	Speaking	A2-B1
55. Snowball Fight	To introduce other students to the class.	Speaking	A2
56. Teacher's Question Time	To write and respond to questions about the teacher and course.	Speaking	A2-B1
57. The Name Game	To give basic personal information about oneself and report the personal information of others.	Speaking	YL
58. Trip to the Moon	To practice introducing oneself.	Speaking	YL
59. Two Truths and a Lie	To introduce oneself by sharing personal information.	Writing and Speaking	A2-B1
60. Who am I?	To ask personal information questions	Speaking	Any
Flashcard Games			
61. Flashcards at Dawn	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	YL
62. Grab it	To review or practice target language.	Vocabulary	Any
63. Mr Wolf	To practice asking and answering simple yes/no questions.	Speaking	A1-A2
64. Sumo	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	YL
65. The Flashcard Exchange	To review or practice target language.	Vocabulary	YL
66. Tiddlywinks	To answer questions related to particular words.	Vocabulary	A1-A2
67. Whisper	To review words, sentence structures or tenses.	Listening and Speaking	Any
Grammar Games			
68. Correction	To identify and correct grammar errors.	Grammar	Any
69. Grammar Auction	To identify and correct grammar errors.	Speaking	Any
70. Grammar Races	To review grammar points and recently taught vocabulary.	Grammar, Vocabulary and Writing	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Grammar Games continued			
71. Just a Minute!	To practice peer correction of impromptu speech.	Grammar and Speaking	B2
72. Verb Races	To practice verb conjugations.	Grammar	A1-A2
Hangman Games			
73. Consonant Hangman	To introduce new vocabulary or revise previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
74. Dice of Fortune	To review previously taught vocabulary or sentence structures.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
75. Last Man Standing	To review film titles, idioms, slogans, and the names of famous people and places.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
76. Letter by Letter Hangman	To review previously taught vocabulary or sentence structures.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
77. Parts of Speech Hangman	To practice parts of speech, sentence structure and grammar.	Grammar and Vocabulary	B1
78. Scrambled Hangman	To review previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
79. Sentence Hangman	To review or practice parts of speech, sentence structure and grammar.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
Listening Games			
80. English Whispers	To review previously taught vocabulary or language points.	Listening and Speaking	Any
81. It's not Musical Chairs	To practice listening for specific details.	Listening	A2-B1
82. Odd One Out	To practice listening for specific details.	Listening	YL
83. Sticky Fingers	To practice listening for keywords or to review recently taught vocabulary.	Listening and Vocabulary	YL
Miming Games			
84. Back to the Board	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
85. Charades	To review and practice previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
86. Classic Charades	To review and practice previously taught vocabulary or a film, song or book titles.	Vocabulary	A2-B1
87. Emphasize	To practice stress, intonation and gesture to express emotion and attitude.	Pronunciation and Speaking	B1-B2

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Miming Games Continued			
88. Verb Antics	To review or practice verbs and verb forms.	Vocabulary and Grammar	Any
89. What am I doing?	To review or practice the present continuous tense.	Grammar and Speaking	A2
Music Games			
90. Let's Dance	To review and practice parts of the body, action verbs and imperatives.	Listening, Vocabulary and Grammar	Any
91. Musical Flashcards	To review and practice previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	YL
92. Musical Madness	To review and practice vocabulary for parts of the body.	Vocabulary	A2
93. Word Grab	To listen for detail and review practice previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Listening	Any
94. Word Snake	To review and practice vocabulary belonging to particular categories.	Vocabulary and Spelling	A1-A2
Question and Answer Games			
95. Balloon Stamp	To practice asking and answering questions.	Speaking	Any
96. Button Up	To practice a variety of question and answer structures.	Speaking	Any
97. Dartboard Game	To practice answering questions.	Speaking	Any
98. Duel	To practice answering questions.	Speaking	A1-A2
99. Fanning the Kipper	To practice answering questions.	Speaking	A1-A2
100. Flinch	To practice answering questions.	Speaking	A1-A2
101. Killer	To practice asking and answering questions using different grammatical structures.	Speaking and Grammar	Any
102. Pac-Man	To practice answering questions.	Speaking	A1-A2
103. The Waiting Game	To practice asking and answering questions.	Speaking	Any
104. Three-Step Tag	To ask and answer target questions set by the teacher.	Speaking	Any
105. True or False?	To practice asking and answering questions.	Speaking	A2-B1
106. Verbal Football	To answer target questions set by the teacher.	Speaking	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Activity Type	Level
Quiz Games			
107. ESL Quiz Game	To review previously taught grammar and vocabulary.	Grammar, Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
108. Guns, Bombs and Angels	To answer general knowledge questions or to review question and answer forms.	Speaking	Any
109. Join the Dots	To answer quiz questions.	Speaking	Any
110. What's the Question?	To review and practice <i>Wh</i> question forms.	Grammar and Speaking	A2-B1
Sentence Race Games			
111. Alphabet Madness	To review and practice parts of speech, grammar and sentence structure.	Grammar and Speaking	A2-B1
112. Balloon Buster	To practice word order and sentence structure.	Grammar	Any
113. Sentence Race	To write sentences in a certain tense using a specific time expression.	Grammar, Vocabulary and Writing	A2-B1
114. Splat	To review practice vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure.	Grammar, Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
115. Translation Race	To translate sentences from the students' native language into English.	Speaking, Grammar and Vocabulary	Any
116. Words to Sentences	To review or practice vocabulary, parts of speech and sentence structure.	Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary	A2-B1
Spelling Games			
117. Backdraw	To review and practice the spelling of recently studied vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
118. Blind Speed Spell	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
119. Chopsticks	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
120. Flower Power	To review and practice the spelling of recently studied vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	A1-A2
121. Remix	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Spelling Games			
122. Spell or Draw	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
123. Spelling Grid	To review and practice the spelling of recently studied vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
124. Spelling Knockout	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
125. Spelling Race	To identify and spell words from pictures.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
126. The Spelling Game	To review the spelling of previously taught vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
127. Up the Ladder	To spell category words beginning with certain letters.	Spelling and Vocabulary	A2-B1
128. Word Chain	To think of a word that begins with the last letter of the previous word.	Spelling and Vocabulary	YL
129. World Cup Spelling	To practice the spelling of general vocabulary.	Spelling and Vocabulary	Any
TV Game Shows			
130. Blankety Blank	To review and practice previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Grammar	A2-B1
131. Blockbusters	To review previously taught or general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	B1-B2
132. Countdown	To review and practice general vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
133. Family Fortunes	To guess the top five answers in a survey.	Vocabulary	B1
134. Mastermind	To review previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
135. Strike it Lucky	To review recently studied vocabulary, grammar or language points.	Grammar and Vocabulary	Any
136. The Price is Right	To practice saying the prices for goods.	Vocabulary	Any
137. The Weakest Link	To answer revision or general knowledge questions.	Speaking	Any
138. Who wants to be a millionaire?	To answer revision or general knowledge questions.	Listening and Speaking	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Verb Games			
139. Catch	To practice verb forms.	Vocabulary	Any
140. Classroom Tennis	To practice irregular verb forms.	Vocabulary	A2-B1
141. The Verb Tree	To review and practice verbs and sentence structure.	Grammar and Vocabulary	Any
142. Things we do...	To review regular and irregular verbs.	Vocabulary	A2-B1
143. Verb Connection	To make sentences or questions with specific verbs and verb forms.	Grammar and Vocabulary	A2-B1
144. Visual Verbs	To review irregular verbs and their various forms.	Vocabulary	Any
Vocabulary Games			
145. Bluff	To review and practice previously taught words and their definitions.	Vocabulary and Speaking	B1-B2
146. Collocation Ladder	To review and practice previously taught collocations.	Vocabulary	A2-B1
147. Over the Line	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	YL
148. People to People	To review parts of the body vocabulary.	Vocabulary	A2
149. Ships of War	To review vocabulary for particular categories.	Vocabulary	Any
150. Vocabulary Deck	To review and practice vocabulary for particular categories.	Vocabulary	Any
Word Association Games			
151. Mallet's Mallet	To review and practice vocabulary for particular categories.	Vocabulary	Any
152. Password	To review previously taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
153. What's the Topic?	To review and practice various topic based vocabulary	Vocabulary	A2-B1
154. Word Association Game	To review and practice general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
155. Word Disassociation Game	To review and practice general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any

Contents

Name	Aim	Skills	Level
Word Games			
156. A Ship Comes Loaded	To review and practice general vocabulary.	Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
157. Balderdash	To invent false definitions for words and guess true definitions.	Vocabulary and Writing	B2
158. Lewis Carroll's Game	To practice or review general vocabulary and spellings.	Vocabulary and Spelling	A2-B1
159. Match the Squares	To review recently taught vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
160. Minimum	To review general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
161. The Longest Word	To review general vocabulary, meanings, and spellings.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
162. Tic Tac Words	To review general vocabulary.	Vocabulary	Any
163. Two Words	To review and practice general vocabulary and sentence structure.	Vocabulary and Speaking	Any
164. Word Race	To review practice words belonging to various categories.	Vocabulary	A2-B1
165. Word Square	To review general vocabulary and spellings.	Vocabulary and Spelling	Any
Yes/No Question			
166. Changing Chairs	To write and respond to yes/no questions.	Grammar	Any
167. Glug	To practice yes/no questions and short answers in various tenses.	Grammar and Speaking	A2-B1
168. The Ring	To practice yes/no questions, short answers, and adjectives of appearance.	Vocabulary and Speaking	A2
169. Throw a Question	To review and practice answering basic yes/no questions.	Speaking	YL
170. Twenty Questions	To practice asking and answering yes/no questions	Grammar and Speaking	A2-B1
171. Virus	To ask and answer yes/no questions.	Grammar and Speaking	Any
172. Yes No Laugh	To ask and answer yes/no questions.	Speaking	A2-B1

Activity Type

Speaking Game:
answering questions

Focus

Giving answers

Aim

To give answers to
questions.

Preparation

None

Level

Young learners

Time

10 minutes

Introduction

Here is a quick and easy ESL game to motivate your students to answer questions. This game can be played in any situation where the students have to answer questions in class, e.g. answering exercise questions.

Procedure

Take a small object such as an eraser.

Hand the object to a student and then turn around facing away from the students.

Tell the students to pass the object around.

After a few seconds have passed, shout 'Stop!'

The student holding the object at that time must then answer a question set by you.

If the student answers the question successfully, they score a point.

If not, the game continues.

When a question has been answered correctly, repeat the process.

Continue until all the questions have been answered correctly.

The student with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Noughts and Crosses

Activity Type

Speaking Game;
answering questions
(group work)

Focus

Giving answers

Aim

To give answers to
questions.

Preparation

None

Level

Elementary (A1-A2)

Time

10 minutes

Introduction

Here is a fun way to go through answers to questions in class.

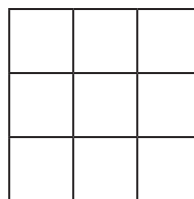
Procedure

Divide the class into two teams.

Decide which team will be noughts and which will be crosses.

Draw a three-by-three grid on the board.

Example:



Ask a question to each team in turn.

If a team answers the question correctly, they draw a nought or cross in the grid.

The first team to get three squares in a row scores one point.

If neither team manages to get three in a row, the team with the most squares scores a point.

Continue playing rounds until all the questions have been answered.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

As a variation, instead of asking a question to each team in turn, ask questions to the class. The first team to answer correctly draws a nought or cross in the grid.

Speak Button Game

Activity Type

Speaking Game:
answering questions
(group work)

Focus

Giving answers

Aim

To give answers to
questions.

Preparation

None

Level

Any

Time

10 minutes

Introduction

Liven up your class when you want to go through answers to questions with this fun ESL game.

Procedure

Divide the students into two teams.

Explain that the students are going to race to answer questions.

Give each team member a number.

The players in both teams should have the same numbers.

For example, if there are six players in each team, number the students in each team one to six. If there is an extra student, give one student two numbers.

Make sure that the teams are at an equal distance from the board.

Draw a circle on the board and write the words 'Speak Button' inside the circle.

Ask a question and then say a number.

The two players with that number run to the board and race to touch the speak button.

The first player to touch the button answers the question.

If the player answers the question correctly, they score a point for their team.

If not, the other player gets to answer the question.

The game continues until all the questions have been answered.

The team with the most points wins the game.

The Buzzer Game

Activity Type

Speaking Game:
answering questions (pair
work)

Focus

Giving answers

Aim

To give answers to
questions.

Preparation

None

Level

Any

Time

10 minutes

Introduction

This amusing ESL game can be played when students have to answer questions in class.

Procedure

Set up the classroom in a horseshoe-shaped seating arrangement with enough seats for half the class.

Divide the students into teams of two.

One student sits on the chair, and the other student stands behind their partner.

Explain that the seated students are 'buzzers' and the standing students are 'contestants'.

Contestants place their hands on the shoulders of their respective buzzer, ready to press down when they know the answer to a question.

Go around checking every team's buzzer is working correctly.

This can be quite entertaining as the students acting as buzzers can make some very interesting buzzer sounds.

Next, read a question to the class.

The first contestant to sound their buzzer can answer the question.

If the contestant gives the correct answer, they score one point.

If not, they are out of that round and other contestants can sound their buzzers and try to answer.

The only one who can answer a question is the contestant.

If a buzzer gets over-excited and buzzes first because they know the answer, the contestant has to answer the question and be rewarded or penalised accordingly.

Have the contestants and buzzers swap roles after a few rounds as some buzzers may run out of voice.

Continue playing until all the questions have been answered correctly.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
brainstorming, listing
(group work)

Focus

Vocabulary revision

Lexical sets

Aim

To write down words
from a category, starting
with each letter of the
alphabet.

Preparation

None

Level

Any

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

Here is an excellent ESL brainstorming game for revising vocabulary and lexical sets.

Procedure

Write three numbered categories on the board corresponding to the vocabulary or lexical sets you wish to revise.

Examples:

1. clothes
2. drinks
3. verbs

Next to the categories, write the letters of the alphabet (A to Z) with a random small number next to each letter.

Example:

A - 2 B - 4 C - 1 D - 3

Next, divide the students into teams of three or four.

Give each team a piece of paper.

Tell the teams to write the letters of the alphabet on the paper.

When they have done that, set a time limit (e.g. five minutes) and call out a category from the board, e.g. clothes.

Teams then race to write down words from that category, starting with each letter of the alphabet.

When the time limit has been reached, teams swap papers for marking.

Teams take it in turns to read out the answers on their paper.

For each correct word, teams score the number assigned to that letter.

Tally up the score for each team and then start a new round.

The team with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
brainstorming, listing
(group work)

Focus

Vocabulary revision

Aim

To brainstorm and write
down words from a
category.

Preparation

Write categories for the
students to brainstorm
on slips of paper.

Examples:

Five things you do before
you go to bed.

Six things that are
watched.

Seven ways to keep fit.

Four things to do on
holiday.

Five things you can read.

Six reasons for being late
to class.

Level

Any

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

Here is a fun brainstorming game to get your students working together and using English.

Procedure

Place a category slip on the teacher's desk.

Divide the students into teams of three or four.

Give each team a piece of paper.

Each team chooses one student to be the 'runner'.

The runners go to the teacher's desk and read the category, e.g. 'Five things you do before you go to bed'.

The runners then go back to their teams and tell their team members the category.

Teams then brainstorm words from that category and write them down.

The first team to finish shouts 'stop' and then calls out their answers.

If their answers are correct, they score one point for each word in the category, e.g. five.

The next category slip is then placed on the desk and a new round begins and so on.

The team with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

Activity Type

Vocabulary and Spelling Game: brainstorming, writing words (group work)

Focus

Vocabulary and lexical sets

Aim

To brainstorm categories of words.

Preparation

None

Level

Any

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

This ESL game is ideal for brainstorming vocabulary or revising categories of words.

Procedure

Draw two to four columns on the board.

Divide the students into a corresponding number of teams.

Have each team line up in front of a column.

Give each team a marker or chalk for writing.

Set a time limit (e.g. five minutes) and then call out a category for the teams to brainstorm.

The teams' task is to write all the words they can think of belonging to that category in the column.

The first student in each team runs to the board, writes a word from the category in the column, runs back, gives the marker or chalk to the next student and goes to the back of the line.

Then, the second student runs to the board and so on.

When the time limit has been reached, stop the game and check the words and spelling for each team.

For each correctly spelt word belonging to the category, teams score one point.

Play several rounds using a different category each time.

The team with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

To stop teams copying each other, you can cross out all the words that are duplicated across the teams.

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
brainstorming, listing
(group work)

Focus

Vocabulary revision

Aim

To write down five words
from a category that
match the teacher's
answers.

Preparation

Write a list of categories
with five words in each
category.

Example:

Five things that are made
of leather.

shoes
bags
belts
wallets
jackets

Level

Pre-intermediate (A2)

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

In this fun brainstorming game, students try to write down five words from a category that match the teacher's answers.

Procedure

Divide the students into teams of three or four.

Give each team a piece of paper.

Explain that you are going to call out a category and that the aim of the game is for the teams to write down five answers that match the five answers you have written down.

Call out a category, e.g. 'Five things that are made of leather'.

Students then brainstorm and write down five answers.

When all the teams have five answers, they swap papers for marking.

You then call out your five answers.

For each matching answer, teams score one point.

Play several rounds.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Here are some examples of categories you can use:

Five things that are watched.
Five things that are round.
Five things that are listened to.
Five things that are made of plastic.
Five things that are read.
Five things that are used in an office.
Five things that are blue.
Five things that are useful.

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
brainstorming, providing
vocabulary (group work)

Focus

Vocabulary revision

Aim

To try to say words from
a category that match
words on a list.

Preparation

Make one copy of the
categories list.

If you wish to revise
other vocabulary, create
your own categories
with ten words in each
category.

Level

Pre-intermediate (A2)

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

In this entertaining brainstorming game, students try to say words from a category that match words on a list.

Procedure

Divide the students into three or four teams.

Call out a category to the first team, e.g. sports.

The first team then has one minute to shout out as many words as they can relating to the category.

The team scores one point for every word that is on the word list.

Afterwards, call out the next category, and it's the second team's turn to play and so on.

The game continues until all the categories have been used.

The team with the most points at the end of the game is the winner.

As an alternative, repeat the same category with all the teams and reveal the scores and answers at the end of each round.

Sports	Countries	Emotions
football tennis volleyball skiing table tennis baseball swimming cricket rugby basketball	England Thailand Japan China Australia America Brazil India France Canada	happy sad angry proud serious brave excited tired bored mad
Parts of the body	Colours	Clothes
arms legs head toes knees thighs neck ears mouth stomach	blue red green yellow orange purple pink white brown gold	shirt shoes trousers socks shorts tie dress skirt hat boots
Things in the classroom	Places	Verbs
rubber pencil pencil case ruler book table students white/blackboard chalk chair	swimming pool school museum library supermarket department store bus station beach amusement park cinema	read jump play run swim hop ride watch eat write
Fruit	Animals	Food
banana pineapple lemon orange apple watermelon strawberry mango papaya guava	dog elephant monkey tiger lion kangaroo shark turtle rabbit chicken	hamburger spaghetti pasta hot dog pizza sandwich rice noodles fish chicken

The Invention Game

Activity Type

Speaking Game:
brainstorming, forming
sentences (group work)

Focus

Can and *could*

Aim

To brainstorm possible
uses for everyday objects
with *can* and *could*.

Preparation

Prepare a list of everyday
objects, e.g. a hammer,
a mirror, a paper bag, an
empty bottle, etc.

Level

Intermediate (B1)

Time

15 minutes

Introduction

In this creative brainstorming game, students brainstorm possible uses for everyday objects with *can* and *could*.

Procedure

Divide the students into teams of three or four.

Tell the students that they are going to play a game where they brainstorm possible uses for everyday objects.

Explain that each time a team calls out an inventive or believable use for an object, they score a point for their team.

If need be, write some language on the board to help the students with their answers.

Examples:

You can/could... with it.
You can/could use it as/to...

Make sure that when students call out their answers, they make a sentence.

Write one of the objects from your list on the board, e.g. a hammer.

Ask the students for possible uses for the object.

Each time a team calls out a suitable answer, award them one point.

Example:

Teacher: What are some possible uses for a hammer?

Team 2: You can hit nails with it.

Teacher: Yes, one point. What else can you do with a hammer?

Team 4: You could measure things with it.

Teacher: Very good. One point. Anything else?

Team 1: You can use it as a weapon.

Teacher: Yes, you can. One point. What else?

Team 3: You could scratch your back with it.

When ideas for an object begin to run out, move on to the next item.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
providing vocabulary
(group work)

Focus

Categories of words

Aim

To keep a balloon
airborne while saying
words from a category.

Preparation

A list of categories and a
balloon.

Level

Elementary (A1-A2)

Time

15 minutes

Introduction

In this energetic categories game, students try to keep a balloon airborne while saying words from a category.

Procedure

Divide the students into four teams.

Create a large space in the classroom.

Divide the space in two with a row of chairs. This acts as the volleyball net.

Explain that the students are going to play in a balloon volleyball tournament.

Invite two teams to play first.

The team members stand spread out on either side of the net.

Give one student the balloon.

You stand by the net and act as umpire.

Start the game by calling out a category you wish to revise, e.g. frequency adverbs.

Every time the balloon is hit, either to another player or over the net to the other team, the student hitting the balloon must say a word from the category.

If the balloon hits the floor, a word is not said, or a word is repeated, the opposing team scores a point.

Play for five minutes, changing the category each time a point is scored.

After five minutes, repeat the game with the other two teams.

The two teams with the most points then face off in the final round of the balloon volleyball tournament to decide the winner.

Activity Type

Vocabulary and Spelling Game: listing (group work)

Focus

Categories of words

Aim

To write words connected to a category.

Preparation

None

Level

Any

Time

15 minutes

Introduction

This categories board race game helps students brainstorm their vocabulary knowledge for a given subject or topic.

Procedure

Draw three or four columns on the board.

Divide the students into a corresponding number of teams.

Have each team line up in front of a column.

Give each team a marker or chalk for writing.

Write a category on the board and set a target number of 10 to 20 words, depending on the level of the class.

The teams' task is to write the target number of words in their column, making sure the words are correctly spelt and that they relate to the category.

The first team to do this wins the round.

The first student in each team runs to the board, writes a word from the category in the column, runs back, gives the marker or chalk to the next student and goes to the back of the line.

The second student then runs to the board and so on.

The teams should check the words being written by their team members.

If they spot a mistake, the student who wrote the word should go back and correct it.

When the target number of words has been reached by one team, stop the game and check the words and spelling for that team.

If the words are appropriate and spelt correctly, the team scores one point.

If not, that team is out of the game and the other teams continue to race until one of them completes the task successfully.

Play several rounds using a different category each time.

The team with the highest score at the end of the game wins.

Category Battleships

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
providing vocabulary,
Battleships (group and
pair work)

Focus

Categories of words

Aim

To find words a partner
has written on a
battleship grid and name
the category the words
relate to.

Preparation

Make one copy of the
worksheet for each
student.

Level

Elementary (A1-A2)

Time

20 minutes

Introduction

In this entertaining category game, students play a game of Battleships to find words and name the category the words relate to.

Procedure

Divide the students into two groups (A and B).

Give each student a copy of the worksheet.

Write a category on a piece of paper and give it to Group A and then do the same for Group B.

Tell the groups to keep their category secret from the other group.

Working together, students come up with seven words belonging to that category.

Three words should be four letters long, two words should be five letters long and two words should be six letters in length.

Students write the words horizontally, vertically or diagonally on the grid entitled 'My ships'.

Next, students pair up with someone from the other group.

Have the students sit back to back so they can't see each other's worksheet.

Students then play a game of Battleships to find out what words their partner has written on their battleship grid and the name of the category the words relate to.

Students take it in turns to call out coordinates to their partner, e.g. C4.

If there is a letter in that square, their partner says 'hit' and reveals the letter.


If the square is blank, their partner says 'miss'.

The student then marks the 'My partner's ships' grid accordingly.

The first student to find all seven words and say the name of the category the words belong to wins the game.

Category Battleships

My ships										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

My partner's ships										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

Activity Type

Vocabulary Game:
naming (group work)

Focus

Categories of words

Aim

To say words from a
category in a limited
amount of time.

Preparation

A ball

Level

Any

Time

15 minutes

Introduction

Here is a challenging category game that can be adapted to any topic or level.

Procedure

Arrange six chairs in a circle.

Invite seven students to play first.

Ask six students to sit on the chairs and one student to stand outside of the circle.

The student outside the circle chooses which player should have the ball and states what the person holding the ball has to name six of.

For example, if you have just finished teaching sports, the student might say 'Name six team sports'.

The player with the ball then passes it to the student sitting next to them and the ball is passed from student to student around the circle.

The player's task is to name the six things before the ball gets back to them.

If the player manages to do this, the student outside the circle chooses another player to name six things and the game is repeated.

If the player cannot name six things by the time the ball reaches them, they are out of the game.

The student standing outside the circle then takes the vacant seat, and a new student joins the game and starts by standing outside the circle.

Alternatively, you could play this game with a different number of students, depending on the size of the class. You could also have all the students play with the loser standing outside the circle.