

Word Games



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1. Anagrams

The teacher writes preferably an 8-letter word or longer on the board and students make as many new words as they can using all the original letters from the given word exactly once. The team that produces the most number of words after the time runs out wins the game.

Variation: When checking the answers, cross out common words that appear in at least two of the teams. The team with most number of unique words wins the game. You may also vary the point scale with higher point goes to difficult or longer words.

2. Jumbled Word

The teacher writes a scrambled word on the board that students need to un-jumble in their teams, e.g LEJMUB → JUMBLE. The first team that guesses and spells the word correctly gets the points.

Variation: For more advanced students, you may give 3 or more jumbled words at once which they need to solve in 1 minute. Points earned per correct answer. You may also try giving scrambled sentence which will test both vocabulary and grammar.

3. Message Relay

The participants are divided into groups and each group forms a line. The person in front will be given a message and must pass it correctly to the next person by whispering until the student in front of the line writes it down. The goal is to get the message relayed to the last person intact and without any changes. If the sentence is perfect they get a point.

4. Back Spell

A kind of relay game where teams of equal size sit down in a neat line. The first student of each row should have a board and marker (but a pen and paper will do). Teacher gives a word to the last students at the end of each line. They need to pass the word along by drawing the word, letter by letter onto the back of the person in front of them until it reaches the first person at the front of the line who need to write the word on their board or paper. The first team to spell the word correctly wins the game.

Variation: You may give different words with the same amount of letters to the last student of each row to prevent cheating. You might also want to teach them some actions or signs before playing the game such as tapping or shaking their head to signify “repeat the drawing”.

5. Simple Simon Says

This is a classic game for teaching imperatives, parts of the body or simply as a classroom management. The teacher gives a command by saying “Simon says ____” and students obey, e.g “Simon says... put your hands on your head.” Players are eliminated from the game by following a command that is not immediately preceded by the phrase “Simon says”, or by failing to follow an instruction which does include the phrase.

Variation: You may ask one of the students to act as “Simon” and give commands to the whole class. The object for the player acting as Simon is to get all the other players out as quickly as possible; the winner of the game is usually the last player who has successfully followed all of the given commands.

6. Hangman

The teacher draws a row of dashes on the board representing each letter of the word that he wants the students to guess. If the guessing player suggests a letter which occurs in the word, the teacher writes it in all its correct positions. If the suggested letter or number does not occur in the word, the teacher draws one element of a hanged man stick figure as a tally mark.

Variation: Split the class into two teams to compete against each other and associate each team with a different marker color, e.g black v blue. Play hangman regularly except now each team gets one guess per round. When the class solves the mystery word, the point goes to the team that guesses more letters. You may also give each team points equal to the number of letters they have guessed.

7. Rock, Paper, Scissors!

Form two teams with equal number students who will line up and compete against each other. The first person from each line will meet at the center and play Rock, Paper, Scissors. The winner can ask the other player to give a word from a category or to answer trick questions. If the player answers incorrectly, they are out and the first team to get all the players from the other team out is the winner.

8. Odd One Out

1. Write three or four words on the board.
2. The students should choose the odd one out (e.g. cat – dog – butterfly – horse).
3. Encourage students to work in teams and come up with their own odd one out words to write on the board.

9. Grab the Word

1. Write the new words on sticky notes and stick them to the board.
2. Divide the students into two teams.
3. Read the word definition.
4. Two students from each of the teams should run to the board and grab the word the definition of which you have read.
5. Read another definition, have another two students run to the board, and repeat this activity.
6. The winning team should have more “grabbed” words than the other team.

10. Karuta Game!

1. Split the kids into two halves, and give each team a cool name.
2. Three kids from each group are nominated to be the designated runners and stand at the back.
3. Put the picture cards at the front of the class.
4. Wander round the class and say "hello" to a random child
5. This child then asks you "Do you like...?" plus one of the foods at the front.

6. You answer "No, I don't".
7. Wander around getting a few more kids to ask you.
8. Eventually you say "Yes, I do!" to one kid's question.
9. The front runner from each group has to rush forward and pick up the matching card.
The further they have to run, the more fun!
10. Continue from 4

Or small group Genki Karuta

1. On one side of the room spread out lots of the picture cards.
2. On the other side of the room the kids form into 4 or 5 groups.
3. The kids line up in parallel lines so the first kid in each group faces the side of the room where the cards are.
4. The kids' ask you today's question and you say an answer that is on one of the cards.
5. The first kid from each group runs forward towards the cards.
6. The first kid to slap their hand down on the correct card gets a point for their team.
7. These kids return to the back of their group's line. A set of new kids are now at the front.
8. Repeat from step 4.

To add variety and to stop accidents, get the kids to go to the cards in different styles e.g. hopping, jumping, stomping, star jumps, frog jumps etc.

Also, after playing many times and the kids are fully aware of the rules you can ask them to be teacher and decide on a movement and call out a flashcard.

11. Monster Drawing Game

Each child has a blank piece of paper and lots of colouring pens. You then describe a monster that the kids have to draw. For example you say "This Monster has 3 RED HEADS" then perhaps "This Monster has 5 PURPLE EYES".

It calms the kids down! If some of them don't seem so keen then tell them they are designing a new Pocket Monster!!! They'll be interested then!!!!

For example.....

1. This Monster has 2 blue heads
2. This Monster has 1 red head.
3. This Monster has 8 purple eyes.
4. This Monster has 3 green mouths.
5. This Monster has yellow hair
6. This Monster has 4 red arms.

12. Fukuwarai - the Make a Face Game!

1. Attach the featureless face to the blackboard (magnets are best!)
2. Put on the blindfold!
3. Choose one body part at random (have them spread out on a desk)
4. Hold it up and ask the kids "What's this?" They answer in English!
5. You face the blackboard, attempting to stick the part onto the face.
6. The kids guide you by shouting out "Left, right, up, down" etc. Ignore any Japanese comments they make, only listen to the English!!
7. Stick the face part onto the face.
8. Repeat from 3

13. The Tower Game

- The person chosen answers a question and if they are correct they come to the front and has 5 seconds to build their tower as high as possible.
- Another version has two students competing at a time per team. Between them are many mixed up flashcards. The teacher says a word, then students are to slap the correct word. The student who got the right answer the fastest is to be given the card and a cup and begins to build the tower, one on top of one. The game ends when a tower falls. The team with the highest tower before the fall wins.

14. Ostrich Game!

1. All the students form a large ring in the classroom.
 2. Select 2 students that will play the game.
 3. These 2 then face each other in the centre of the ring.
 4. Using a clip fasten a picture card to the back of each student.
 5. The kids must always have their hands behind their back.
 6. Get them to perform a Sumo Stomp and then say "Ready, steady go!!"
 7. The kids now have to try and see what card is on their opponents back.
 8. When they know the answer they put their hand in the air and you ask them what it is.
 9. If he/she is correct they win!
 10. Choose two new students and repeat from step 3.
- Make sure the kids who form the ring don't shout out the answer!
 - Insist that the kids always have their hands behind their backs.

- They must also always stay inside the ring.
- Jumping is one of the best tactics - hence the "Ostrich Game"!

15. Ball and Music!

1. Have a CD player playing some fast, genki music.
 2. Whilst the music is playing the kids pass a ball around.
 3. You stop the music.
 4. The kid who is holding the ball when the music stops is the one selected.
- A more advanced, and more effective version of the game is that the kids must perform today's language when passing the ball. For example one kid says "What's your name?", the other kid answers and then gets the ball! Try it, it makes a big difference!
 - Make sure the music is fast and lively. Turn your back to the kids when you hit the pause button, this removes any accusation of favouritism!
 - It's usually more fun to let them pass the ball in any direction. However clever kids will soon catch onto the idea of only passing the ball to their teammates. If this happens then simply tell them the ball has to pass along in sequence, along the rows that the kids are sat in.

- If there is doubt as to who is holding the ball, for example half way through a changeover, then tell them to "Janken" (paper, scissors, stone). All Japanese kids know this, and more impressively they always abide by the outcome!
- Insist that they only pass the ball, not throw it!!

16. Island Hopping!

1. Give each player a pile of picture cards. They can be different cards, but the amount of cards should be the same for each person.
2. The teacher says "go!"
3. The kids pick up the top card of their pile of cards.
4. They shout out the word on the card. Or for a more challenging version they make up a sentence that features that word.
5. They put the card on the floor and walk onto it.
6. Repeat from 3.
7. Each card has to touch the edge of the previous card.
8. First kid to reach the other side of the classroom wins!

17. The Group Game

1. All the kids run round the gym in a big circle
2. The teacher shouts out a number.
3. The kids have to stop and make groups that contain this number of people. For example if the teacher said "3", then the kids get in groups of 3.
4. When they get all the members of their team they sit down.
5. Repeat from 1

18. Leapfrog

1. On the board, from left to right put about 8 or 9 picture cards.
 2. Split the class into two teams. One team lines up on the left side of the room, and the other team on the right side of the room.
 3. The first kid from each team comes to the board, one at the left side and one at the right. They read the words out loud, one at a time, "leaping" along to their opponent's side of the board.
 4. When they meet they have to "janken" (i.e the Rock, Paper, Scissors game, use the Genki English song to teach it). The losing kid sits down. This kid is replaced by the next member in their team. This member starts from the start of their line. The winning kid continues from where he/she stopped.
 5. The teacher says "go!" and they start again, reading the words out loud until they meet.
 6. Repeat from 4
 7. If they manage to reach their opponent's side of the board they have won!
- This is a really quick, no preparation game - enjoy!
 - You can use it for any vocab. In Junior High you can use "Cool Words" with things like "Cool", "Check it out", "Amazing", "You OK?" or whatever.

19. The Hammer Game!

1. Split the class down the middle into two groups, the kids on the left are the left group and the kids on the right are the right group!
2. The left group form a single file line down the left hand side of the room.
3. The right group form a single line file down the right hand side of the room.
4. The front person from each group come and stand facing each other in front of the teacher.
5. One student says an English word (any word is OK, for example "banana")
6. The other student says another English word.
7. You keep going backwards and forwards like this until...if they repeat a word (i.e. one of the pair have already said it) then the person who said the repeated word gets a hit on the head and sits down in their seat. The other person, the winner, rejoins the back of their queue and will eventually get another go.
8. Similarly if they speak another language, or pause or hesitate then they get a bash on the head and have to sit down, and their opponent gets back in line.
9. The next two people come to the front
10. Repeat from 5 until all the members from one of the teams is sat down. This team is the loser and the other team is the winner!

20. Banana Tree Game!

A scoring game, and can be used in various different ways. Here's one variation using the Ball and Music Game.

1. Put the kids in groups (6 is usually good as there are usually 6 rows of desks), but keep them seated at their desks.
 2. Draw pictures of trees on the board, one tree for each group. Each tree has 9 "rungs" (add more or less depending on the amount of time you wish to play), and some bananas at the top. (see the picture above) This takes about 1 minute if you're quick!
 3. Each team then has an animal which will climb the tree (e.g. Monkey, Koala also things like "cow" or "helicopter" are very amusing!).
 4. Explain that the aim of the game is to eat the bananas at the top!
 5. During the game you play some music (something fast and dancey). When the music plays the kids pass a ball around (no throwing!!).
 6. You stop the music.
 7. You then ask the person holding the ball a question ("What's this? How are you? What's your name? etc.)
 8. If the student gets it right then their team's animal climbs one rung up the tree!
 9. Repeat from step 4 until one team reaches the top - and the bananas!
- This is good for a review session, or even for practicing new vocab. 9 rungs lasts about 20 minutes. After the first few tries I then ask questions that are worth 2 "rungs", or even ask the kids if they want an easy question for 1 point or a tricky one for 2 points!!

21. Jeopardy Game!

Do a review of about 30 vocab words and then....

1. On the board fasten (magnets is the best way) the 30 picture cards. Arrange them in 3 rows of 10 each. The fronts should be blank.
2. Label the 3 rows as A, B and C. Label the ten columns from 1 to 10.
3. Row A should be easy words, row B medium level and row C difficult words.
4. Assign the kids to one of two teams. (give the teams interesting names like "monkey" or "rabbit" or whatever. You could also try using the Ski Game to count, but board space is a bit tight!)
5. Do the Ball and Music Game
6. The kid with the ball chooses between A, B or C questions. A is easy so is worth 10 points, B is worth 20 points and C is difficult and is worth 30 points. They also choose a number between 1 and 10.
7. The teacher then takes the card that corresponds to the row and column that the kid has chosen.
8. Turn the card over and if the kid can say the word in English they get the points!
9. Continue from step 5

Find more games here

<https://genkienglish.net/teaching/esl-preschool-games-for-kindergarten/>

22. Last Man Standing

This game is fast-paced, but allows students some time to think. It also encourages peer learning, as students will pick up on words they hear others speaking. To play the game, grab a ball and have all the students form a circle. Name a category or theme, such as things found in a kitchen, food, professions, and so on.

Begin by tossing the ball at a student. That student will shout a word related to the theme and throw the ball to another student. As each person catches the ball, they need to come up with another word that fits the theme. If they repeat a word that has already been said or can't think of a new one within a few seconds, they are out and must sit on the sidelines. Don't worry, they'll still be learning!

Take things up a notch with a different version of "Last Man Standing." Instead of naming a theme, each student gives the next student another theme. For example, you might start off with "something red." The first student to catch the ball could say "strawberry" and then choose another topic and throw the ball to the next student. This makes the game much more difficult, since students cannot think of a word until they know what their theme is.

23. Pictionary

Most English speakers are familiar with *Pictionary*, the drawing game. You can use the cards from the actual board game to create a classroom activity that will thrill your students. This is a good, high action game that students really get into.

Chalkboard *Pictionary*. To play in a classroom with many students, it's not very practical to use the game board. This means you'll be using the chalkboard or whiteboard at the front of the room.

Divide the class into two teams and create a small column for each team on one side of the board. You'll record their points here. Have one person from Team A come up to the front. Have the student draw a card (try using *Pictionary Junior* cards if the adult ones are too advanced for your class). Alternatively, you can write words on slips of paper for students to choose.

The student must convey the word to his or her team using only drawings. Students cannot use words, symbols or hand gestures. Limit the time to three minutes maximum. Each correct word is a point and the first team to get 10 points is the winning team.

24. Charades

Charades is quite similar to *Pictionary*, but it uses actions to communicate the secret word in place of photos. This is a great game for those days when your class is dragging and people are falling asleep. Get them up and get them moving!

Write down words on slips of paper for students to choose. Verbs are likely to be the easiest, but you can also use more complicated words, provided you are sure most of the students know them.

Divide the class into two teams and have one person from each team choose a piece of paper and act out the word. The teams must guess the correct word before three minutes run out. For each correct word, that team receives a point. The team that hits ten points first is the winning team.

25. Taboo Words

Taboo Words helps students practice with synonyms and descriptions. Separate the class in half and have the two teams sit on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Each team will choose a person to sit in front of their team, facing them in the “hot seat.” You will stand behind the students and hold up a piece of paper with a word on it. The students in the hot seats will not be able to see these papers.

Teams have three minutes (or any amount of time you want to set) to get their hot seat member to say the word on the paper. The catch is, they *can't* say the word under any circumstances.

Tips for playing in a large class. If you have more than 12 students in a class, things can get a little chaotic with this game. In this case, it's usually simpler to divide everyone into teams of 5-6 people and have only one team go at a time.

26. 20 Objects

Test your students' memories and vocabulary at the same time with this fun game. All you need is a clear desk and 20 common items from around the classroom. You can even grab things from your backpack or purse.

Arrange the objects on the desk and let students gather around to look at them. Cover everything with a sheet (or something similar) after one minute and send everyone back to their seats. Each students should write out as many items as they can remember on a piece of paper, all in English.

When everyone is done, write a list of the items on the chalkboard and allow students to self-correct. Alternatively, you can call out the objects and give a point for each one that is correctly written.

27. Categories

Students will beg to play this game once they get the hang of it! It's a great way to fill up the last few minutes of class, too.

Have students draw six columns on their paper and write a category at the top of each column. You can choose categories that fit what you've been studying in class or go with some basics. Popular categories include food, names, cities or countries, furniture, verbs and clothing.

Choose a random letter and write it on the board. Give students enough time to write down a word for each category that starts with that letter. You can repeat with new letters as many times as you like.

28. Letter Scramble

Take a list of words that your students have recently learned and write a scrambled version of each on the board. Allow students to unscramble the words on their paper. The first one to finish deciphering all the words wins.

29. Chalkboard Acronym

Write a word vertically on the board and then have students come up, one at a time, to write a word starting with each letter of the vertical word. For example:

Cute

Under

Porcelain

Make this tougher by requiring the words to be related to the acronym.

30. What Am I Thinking Of?

If you've ever played 20 Questions, you already know how this game goes. To make it a little easier on your students, however, you're going to include some visual clues.

Pair students up and have them think of an object. Each student should write 5-10 words describing the object on a piece of paper. When you call time, the students swap papers and try to figure out what the other person described. The first team to have both words guessed correctly wins.

10. Word Bingo

You'll need to do a little preparation for this game, but it's well worth it. Make bingo sheets with a 4x4 grid and add words to each square. Hand these out (each one should be unique) and have students mark the correct word when you call it out. The first person to finish marking their entire page wins.

There are some fun variations to Word Bingo!

Picture Bingo: Use pictures on the Bingo card and call out the words that relate.

Synonym Bingo: Get those brains working by giving students a word that means the same thing as a word on their card.

Antonym Bingo: This is just as it sounds. Call out the antonyms of words on their cards and see how many students get it.

ESL vocabulary games make class time a little more exciting. You can use them to review previously learned words, but keep in mind that games also make great rewards for when your students do well in class.