

Top 10 Teacher's Choice ESL Games and Activities

Original content from Jackie Bolen of [ESL Speaking](#)

For even more ESL games and activities, check out: [39 No-Prep/Low-Prep ESL Speaking Activities](#) on Amazon.

1. Typhoon

Skills: Listening/speaking

Time: 30 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: White board and questions

This is an extremely fun review game that any age group of students will love that requires a little prep but no materials. Every single time I play it, my students always want to play again and talk about it for the rest of the semester. Draw a grid on the board, marking one row with numbers, one with letters. 5x5 works well for a 30 minute game. Put in two or three of each of the following letters, secretly on your master paper, but not the board. On the board will just be a blank grid.

T = typhoon. Lose all your points

H = hurricane. Pick 1 team, for minus 5

V = vacation. Get 5 points for free

E = easy question, 1 point

M = medium question, 3 points

D = difficult question, 5 points.

Fill in the rest of your grid with these easy, medium and difficult questions. Then depending on how big your class is, make 4-5 teams. They pick a square, (B-6 for example), then you write the letter in the box and ask them the question or reveal the “special square” that corresponds to it. Have a list of easy/medium/hard questions prepared beforehand. If they get the question correct, give them the points, if not, erase the letter in the box and another team can pick that square if they want and get the same question.

Here is the grid and questions that I prepared for one of my university classes in Korea. You can use this same grid, but just edit it with your own questions. Quick and easy!

[Typhoon Game](#)

Teaching Tips: if one team is running away with a certain victory, you can adjust it on the fly by switching some squares around but don't be obvious about it. For example, if the team who is in the lead gets a vacation or hurricane, you can easily switch it with an easy question. Then later in the game, hopefully one of the last place teams will get the vacation or hurricane instead.

If you want to make it more fun, you can be kind of dramatic when writing the letter up in the grid on the board. For example, just do the downstroke of T, H, E, etc. and students will be anxious to know what it is. I also often say things, “Oooooohhhh, bad weather is coming.” Or, “Hmmm....the sky is getting very dark.”

Make sure that all the students get a chance to participate by saying that once a student on a certain team has answered a question, they can't answer again until all the other team members have. However, their teammates can help them by giving some hints if necessary so that the lower level students won't feel embarrassed or like they're letting down their teams.

Procedure:

1. Prepare review questions beforehand, as well as a “grid” with the appropriate letters marked on it (T, H, V, E, M, D).
2. Write the corresponding grid on the whiteboard, but be sure not to reveal the letters. It should just be blank at this point.
3. Put the students into four teams. They can rock-scissor-paper to decide who goes first. The first team chooses a square and then you reveal which letter it contains. If a special square, perform that action and if a question, ask the appropriate level of question.
4. Keep track of the total points and continue the game until all squares are revealed.

2. Flashcard Sentences

Skills: Speaking

Time: 15 Minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: Flashcards

You can use this for whatever grammar and vocabulary points you're studying. Go around the room asking each student, or pair a question. Pull a flashcard from your pile and then the student has to make a sentence using the grammar point with that card. A correct sentence gets the card, not correct, and the card goes back at the bottom of the pile. The winner is the person or the team with the most points.

3. In Front of/ Behind/Between

Skills: Listening/Speaking

Time: 10 Minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Flashcards

Place some flashcards on your board ledge, or leaning against the wall at the front of the room. I like to use 3 sets of 3. Place them so that the students can't see the pictures, but show them which flashcards are which before you do this. Place them so that there is one card in front, one in between and one behind. Then, ask some questions such as, "What's in front of the elephant?" or "What's in-between the Giraffe and the Gorilla?" The students that can answer the questions correctly get a point.

You can make this activity more difficult by increasing the number of cards to four or five. Or, you can place some cards leaning against the wall, as well as some one of the table. Then, you can add between, above and below/underneath.

4. Where's the _____?

Skills: Listening

Time: 10 Minutes

Level: Beginner

Materials: Flashcards

Place 10-15 English flashcards around the room. Announce what each one is before you place them face-down so the picture is not obvious. Then, have the students stand-up and you say, "Find the _____." The first student to get the card gets one point. Keep playing until one student has a certain number of points. Three or five points works well, depending on the class size.

5. Charades

Skills: Speaking

Time: 20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Whiteboard

You can use this to review whatever you're studying. Verbs works especially well. Write out some phrases or words that can be easily acted out on small pieces of paper and put them in an envelope.

Divide the class up into two teams. The first team sends one person up to the front and they have to act out as many things as they can in two minutes. Then the next team goes. Make sure that the team sends up a different person for each round. You can do as many rounds as you want.

6. Draw a Picture, but Someone Else is Talking

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Blank paper, picture

This is a fun way to practice body parts or descriptive words (big, small, long, etc) and I guarantee that everyone will be laughing throughout this activity. The students sit back to back and one person is the "talker" and the other one is the "drawer." The person talking describes something that they're looking at to their partner (a face, body, city, monster etc) and that person draws what they hear. The results are usually hilarious and fun to show to the rest of the class!

Teaching Tips: this activity can get quite loud so it's best to ask students to spread out

in the classroom, if possible. If you have a class of 20 or more packed into a tiny classroom, you should probably not use this one.

If you teach kids, this is really fun too, but you could do it in a more teacher-centered way. For example, the students could describe a picture to you that you draw on the board, or you could describe something to them and they all draw their own versions of it.

If you have your own classroom, you can put the “artwork” up the wall, along with the original picture.

Procedure:

1. Two students sit back to back, but close enough to talk to each other.
2. Give student A a picture of some kind, based on whatever you are studying.
3. Student A describes the picture to student B who must draw it, without looking at the original picture.
4. Compare the pictures and laugh a lot!

7. An Interesting Story +Questions

Skills: Writing/Reading/Speaking/Listening

Time: 15-30 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials: Nothing

Have students write something interesting. Some examples: most embarrassing moment, scariest thing you've ever done, your dream for the future, etc. It's best if it's related to something from the pages in the textbook that you're teaching that day. The length depends on the level, but from 4-8 sentences works well.

Once they're done, put them in groups of four. They can take turns reading out their story to the group and then each person in the group has to ask them one related question about their story to get some more information. Encourage interesting questions and the need to listen carefully.

8. Chain Spelling

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: Nothing

If you want to practice spelling some vocabulary words that you've been teaching, use this game. Have all the students stand up and the teacher says a word. The first student says the first letter, the next student the next letter, and on and on. If someone makes a mistake, they sit down and you start with the next student and new word. Go until you have only 1 or 2 students standing.

9. Scavenger Hunt

Skills: Reading

Time: 30-60 minutes.

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Cell-phone cameras

You can make this as simple or complicated as you want. Put the students in groups of 3-5 and make sure each group has a camera. They have to go around the school or campus finding various things. A simple example would be, "Something purple" and a more complicated one: "A leaf that has fallen from a tree and died." Then, when they find each thing, the group can take a picture of it. The first group to make it back with all things completed is the winner. Or, you can give them a time-limit and see how many things they are able to complete.

Include a rule for what happens if the group is missing a picture, or has gotten one incorrect. Mine is usually +6 minutes in this case.

10. Bumbling Blindfold

Skills: Speaking/Listening

Time: 20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials: Blindfold

If you're studying about directions (go straight, left, right, turn-around, stop, etc) this is a really fun activity. Blindfold one student and put them at the starting point. The other students have to give them directions so they can get to the finish point without bumping into anything. It's best if you assign only 1-2 students to give directions so it's not so noisy and confusing.

Original content from Jackie Bolen: [My Life! Teaching in a Korean University](#)

