

TEACHER'S CORNER – JANUARY 2017

GRAMMAR GAMES

For many students, grammar lessons can be boring, repetitive, and not very meaningful. As English teachers, we have to provide grammar instruction, but we often struggle to make it fun and memorable for our learners. How can we make this necessary, but sometimes dull, part of language learning interesting and engaging for students?

Playing games can give learners a meaningful way to practice new grammatical structures and concepts in context. Unlike completing exercises from a textbook, games can provide learners with an opportunity to use language authentically, making learning more meaningful and memorable.

Additionally, games can lower students' affective filter (negative emotional or motivational factors that can hinder learning) and improve motivation. Playing a game can increase students' investment in their own learning and help them retain information better than simple exercises.

This month in the Teacher's Corner, we will present several games you can use with your students to make learning and practicing grammar fun.

Week 1: Grid Games

Week 2: Two Active Verb Tense Games

Week 3: Adjectives and Adverbs in Action

Week 4: List and Mingle with Mixed Grammar Skills

GRID GAMES

Grids can be used to play many different games. The games can give students a chance to practice grammar concepts. A great way to review subject-verb agreement is shown below in our first activity. The variations that follow can easily be applied to the same size grid, or a larger one, to help students review other grammar skills.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT GRID

Skills: This activity can be used to practice subject-verb agreement. Students will also practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing during the game.

Materials:

- Chalk/markers and a chalk/whiteboard
- A timer

Example Grid:

Verb: _____ (infinitive)
Tense: _____

He	You (plural)	We
They	Familiar person's name	It
I	You (singular)	She

How to Play:

1. Create a large 3 x 3 grid on the board. Divide students into two equal teams, Team X and Team O. Each team should choose a speaker, a recorder, and a writer. The speaker will act as the

communicator for the team. The recorder writes down the team's response on paper during the discussion. The writer goes up to the board to write down the team's final answer.

2. Choose a verb and tense for students to practice and write them at the top of the grid.
3. Explain to students that the two teams will compete to get three of their symbols in a row on the grid by taking turns. In order to do so, they must use verbs correctly in sentences with the subjects shown on the grid. If they write a grammatically-correct sentence, they can place their team's symbol (X or O) in the space on the grid.
4. A coin toss can be used to determine who will go first. Tell students that the goal is not only to get three of their team's symbols in a row on the grid, but also to prevent the other team from doing so. Remind students to keep both goals in mind when choosing which subjects to attempt in the grid.
5. The team chosen to go first should pick a subject from the grid. As soon as the choice is made, the teacher must set the timer for 30 seconds to one minute (depending on the level of students). The team must collaborate to write a sentence before the timer goes off. The sentence must contain the subject from the grid and the correct conjugation of the verb (from the top of the grid). Note that teams should collaborate quietly in order to prevent the other team from overhearing their discussion.
6. Once the timer goes off, the writer must bring his/her team's paper up to the front of the room and write the team's sentence on the board. The opposing team will read the sentence and decide if it is correct or incorrect. If it is correct, the writer may replace the subject with an X or O for his/her team in the grid. If the team does not complete the sentence within the allotted time or the sentence is incorrect, they lose a turn and the other team gets to go again.
7. This process is repeated until one of the teams gets three symbols in a row and wins, or until all of the spaces on the grid have been filled in. The game can be repeated with new verbs and/or tenses.

VARIATIONS

1. This game can be played with multiple grids at the same time. Instead of one, create three grids on the board. The grids can all be for the same verb, but different tenses, or for three different verbs. The goal in this instance would be for a team to "win" two out of three grids by getting three symbols in a row.

2. The game can also be used to practice irregular verbs. Students can practice the irregular conjugations for each of the subjects noted in the grid.
3. Instead of playing this game as a whole class, students can play in small groups of four to ten students. Have students form teams within the groups. Monitor the activity and assist with any questions about correct responses or disagreements.
4. Rather than using pronouns, fill the grid with names or nouns such as *teachers, a student*, or anything else that could work with the chosen verb. You can use names and people that are familiar to your students to make the game more fun!
5. To make this game more challenging try using a larger grid, like a 5 x 5. Fill up the spaces with different pronouns, names, and nouns. In this case, students must get five of their symbols in a row to win.
6. The game can be “reversed” by filling the grid with different tenses, such as present, future, past continuous, past perfect, etc. Write a verb (infinitive) at the top of the grid, and also note a subject, such as “we.” In this instance, students must conjugate the verb for the noted subject in the tense specified for the space where they are trying to put their symbol. This version could be played on a 3 x 3 grid or a larger one. This variation would work well for advanced students.

Grid games are an easy, fun way to engage students in grammar practice without a lot of extra materials or planning. The flexibility of grid games makes them ideal for use with a wide variety of grammatical concepts. Take a look at [Try This: Listening and Logic](#) from *English Teaching Forum* for another great language practice activity using grids.

TWO ACTIVE VERB TENSE GAMES

Games that get learners out of their seats moving around are not only fun, but also appeal to different learning styles. This week, we present two games that can be used to practice verb tenses in active ways that create memorable learning experiences for students.

SENTENCE RELAY

Skills: This game can be used to practice a specific verb tense or to review several tenses at the same time. Students also practice syntax and writing during this activity.

Materials:

- Paper slips with a noun, verb, and tense (if playing for mixed review) written on each one
- Two or three containers to hold the slips of paper (one for each team)
- Chalk/markers and a chalk/whiteboard, or paper and pencils for each team

How to Play:

1. If desired, have students brainstorm a list of nouns and verbs (in the infinitive) to use in the game. The list can also be created by the teacher ahead of time. Record one noun and one verb on each slip of paper. If you plan to practice multiple tenses, write a tense for students to use on each slip.
2. Mix up the slips and divide them evenly amongst the containers for each team. There should be at least one slip of paper per student, but there can be extras.
3. Divide the class into two or three equal teams. Make sure that students know the person from each team who will start the relay, and the order in which other students will follow.
4. The game is a relay during which each team competes to send one person at a time up to the front of the room to write grammatically correct sentences the fastest. The first person comes up to the board or paper where sentences are being recorded, reaches into the container, and chooses a slip. Then, they must write a sentence using the noun and verb, in designated tense, on their team's paper or the board.
5. The student should keep the slip for their sentence and return to their team. They can high five the first person to signal that they can then move to the board to write the next sentence. No one should move until they have gotten a high five from the returning team member.

6. This continues until everyone on the team has had a chance to write a sentence. Teams can earn two points for finishing first, or one point for finishing in second place.
7. Sentences must be checked for accuracy. If only one tense is being practiced, teams can trade sentences and check each other's. If multiple tenses are being practiced, the whole class can check them together. Have each student read what was on his/her slip of paper aloud and then the class can check the sentence they wrote for accuracy.
8. Teams can earn one point for each correct sentence. Add any points awarded for fast finishers and the team with the most points wins!

WHAT DID HE/SHE DO?

Skills: This game can be used to practice the past tense of irregular verbs. Students also practice speaking and listening during this activity.

Materials:

- Paper slips with an irregular verb (infinitive) written on each one
- A container to hold the slips of paper
- Paper and pencils for each team

How to Play:

1. If you have beginner students or feel it is necessary, review the past tense of the irregular verbs you plan to use for the game before you start.
2. Divide the class into small groups of three to five students. Have the groups sit so that everyone can see the front of the classroom and can whisper ideas without other groups overhearing the discussion. Assign each group a name or allow each team to choose one.
3. Depending on how many irregular verbs you have, and the size of your class, the "actors" can be chosen in different ways. Each team can elect a representative actor or two who will get to act out one verb at the front of the class. Or, each team member can be assigned a number and the teacher can randomly call a team name and number to come up to act out a verb. Students can also volunteer to be the actors.
4. Once an actor is chosen, the student should come up to the front of the room and choose a random slip of paper from the container. They will silently read the verb and perform the action.

For instance, if the verb is “bite” the actor would pretend to bite something without making a sound or saying anything.

5. Teams of students must observe the actor and quietly confer about what they believe he or she did. Each team needs to agree on how to use the past tense of the irregular verb in a sentence to describe the person’s actions. Sentences should be numbered as the game progresses. For example if the verb acted out was “bite”, students could write something like “1: Julisa bit an apple” on their paper. The teacher should keep a list of what each actor does so that sentences can be checked for accuracy at the end of the game.
6. Once all of the verbs have been acted out, teams should exchange papers. The teacher can call on different groups to tell which verb they guessed and read the sentence with the correct past tense form. Each group should check the sentences they have for accuracy and note any errors.
7. One point is awarded for each sentence containing the irregular verb correctly used in past tense. Teams with the most points win.

Both of the activities described this week engage students in creative and physically active grammar practice. Using these activities will allow students to apply grammar skills in an authentic and memorable way. For more active games, try [Cops and Robbers: We Were Watching a Movie at the Movie Theater](#) from a past Teacher’s Corner or [Teaching Techniques: Running for Your Words](#) from *English Teaching Forum*.

ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS IN ACTION

So far this month, we have presented games to practice subject-verb agreement and verb tenses. While these are very important grammar skills for English language learners to master, adverbs and adjectives are also critical to add detail to students’ spoken and written work. This week, we will focus on two games to help students practice meanings and how to use both of these parts of speech correctly.

STOP AND SIT

Skills: This game practices adverb meanings and syntax. Students also practice listening and speaking as they play.

Materials:

- Chairs (one less than the number of students)
- A list of verbs that students can “do” during the game (see suggestions below or have students brainstorm a list)
- A list of adverbs that can modify the verbs
- A device to play music if desired

Example Action Verbs and Adverbs:

Action Verbs	Adverbs
Walk	Angrily
Run	Quickly
Skip	Slowly
Snore	Sleepily
Crawl	Eagerly
Swim	Furiously
Eat	Happily
Gallop	Lazily
Hop	Politely
Talk	Hastily
Sew	Shyly
Cook	Proudly
Mix	Sadly
Jump	Tiredly
Sleep	Rapidly
Whisper	Frantically

Laugh Write	Calmly Elegantly
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How to Play:

1. Set up the chairs. One option is to arrange chairs in two back-to-back rows so that students can move around them. Another option is to spread them out in a random way around the classroom and have students move throughout the space during the activity.
2. Explain to students that you will give a command that contains a verb and an adverb, such as “Students, please crawl slowly.” Even if the verb does not usually require movement (for instance, snore) tell students that they must walk and perform the action so that they are always moving around the chairs.
3. Once the command is given, students must follow it, moving either around the chairs in a circle or throughout the room. You can play music during the time that students are moving if desired.
4. When you want students to stop say, “Stop and sit!” and turn off the music if you are playing it. Students must then find a chair as quickly as possible.
5. Each round will end with one student who is unable to find a chair fast enough. This student is out of the game and must not participate in future rounds. Remove one chair each time a student is eliminated so that there is always one fewer than the number of students. You can allow the student who is gets eliminated each time to give the command for the next round.
6. Continue until only one chair and two students remain. The last student to claim a seat is the winner!

DESCRIBE IT RELAY

Skills: During this game, students will practice generating adjectives and using them correctly in sentences. Students will also read and write during the activity.

Materials:

- Familiar objects that students can easily describe in terms of color, shape, size, taste, smell, or other attributes (Suggestions for items include classroom objects, fruits/vegetables or other foods, toys, familiar books/movies, household items, articles of clothing, etc. If you do not have access to the actual objects, you can also use pictures of items printed from the internet or cut out of magazines.)
- A large bag/box to put objects and/or pictures in

- Paper and pencils for each team
- A timer

How to Play:

1. Divide the class into two to four teams with an equal number of students in each one. Have students arrange themselves according to a characteristic such as age, height, birthday month, etc. Designate which student will go first and be sure that those who follow know the order of who goes next. If your space permits, have students line up accordingly.
2. Choose a “recording area” where each team’s paper and pencils will be located. Ideally each recording area should be an equal distance from where you ask teams to line up. One suggestion is to place a desk or chair at the front of the room for each team. Be sure to separate the desks/chairs sufficiently so that teams cannot see each other’s papers.
3. This game is a relay during which each team competes to quickly write grammatically correct, descriptive sentences about an object (or picture). Explain to students that you will start a timer and then pull an object from the bag and hold it up. As soon as the object is displayed, the first student from each team must hurry to their team’s paper and write a descriptive sentence about the object. Tell students that they must not repeat any of the adjectives already used by their teammates, and that each sentence must be grammatically and mechanically correct to earn a point.
4. When the sentence is complete, they return to their team, lightly tag the next person in line, and get behind the last person in line. The process is repeated, with each new player coming to write a new sentence, until time runs out.
5. When time is up, the teacher checks each paper for correct sentences. A point is awarded for each sentence that accurately describes the object, is grammatically correct, and uses a new adjective. Points should be recorded for each team after each round of play. Alternatively, students can check each other’s work and calculate points.
6. The game is repeated until all of the objects (or pictures) have been presented for students to describe. The team with the most points is the winner.

Adverbs and adjectives can add detail to students’ spoken and written English. Both of the games presented this week will help students incorporate these parts of speech in memorable ways. Give students additional practice with descriptions in English using [Guess What?](#) and [Picture This!](#) from the Activate Games for Learning American English series.

LIST AND MINGLE WITH MIXED GRAMMAR SKILLS

Certain games are great for practicing specific grammar skills. However, it is also beneficial for every teacher to be able to utilize games that provide students with an opportunity to practice a variety of skills. This week, we present two games that can be used to review many different grammatical concepts.

LIST OF EIGHT

Skills: This game can be used to practice a variety of grammar skills. Students also practice listening and speaking as they play.

Materials:

- An object that can easily be passed around a circle such as a ball
- Prompts asking students to verbally list five words according to specific criteria (see below)
- A timer

Example Prompts:

- List eight adjectives that begin with the letter ____.
- List eight adjectives to describe _____.
- List eight action verbs in the _____ tense.
- List eight nouns you would find in a _____.
- List eight examples of proper nouns that are people/places/titles.
- List eight synonyms/antonyms for _____.
- List eight adverbs that could be used to describe the verb _____.
- List eight verbs you would do at the _____ in _____ tense.

How to Play:

1. Arrange all of your students in a large circle. Create teams by having students count around the circle (1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc.) to designate which team they are on. Students will not move, but should remember their team number. The goal is to have members of each team mixed up and not seated next to each other in the large circle. List the teams on the board to keep track of points. (Note that in this version of the game, points are actually damaging and the team that ends the game with the *least* amount of points is the winner!)

2. Give the object that will be passed around to the student who will go first. The student should hold on to the object until a verbal prompt is given. This student is “it” for the first round.
3. At the moment the prompt is stated, start a timer for thirty seconds to one minute. The student who is “it” must pass the object clockwise to the next person as soon as they say the first item according to the prompt.
4. Students continue to quickly pass the object around the circle as long as items are being listed. When eight items have been listed, or when the timer goes off, the object stops.
5. If the student who was originally “it” was able to list eight words that correctly adhere to the prompt, then the person who is holding the object gets a point for his/her team. If the student who was originally “it” was unable to list eight words correctly before the allotted time, his/her team gets a point.
6. The student who ends up holding the object is “it” for the next round. A new prompt is given, the timer starts, and the student passes the object clockwise as soon as they list the first word.
7. Continue the game until all of the prompts have been given. The team with the fewest points wins!

20 QUESTIONS MINGLE

Skills: This game helps students practice forming questions using *is* and *does* with adjectives, verbs, and prepositional phrases. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are also practiced during the activity.

Materials:

- Pictures of people, places, or things related to a theme (such as animals, classroom objects, occupations, etc.). You will need one picture for each student playing the game.
- Masking tape

Example Recording Table:

This table can be copied from the board into students’ notebooks. Students can number their classmates’ names 1-20 to keep track of how many questions they have asked.

Classmate’s Name	Question you asked	Response
1 Sarah	Is it edible?	yes
2 Jin	Is it round?	no

3 Eduardo	Does it have a scent?	yes
4 Mary	Is it sweet?	yes

Example Questions:

- Is it _____? (large, small, tall, short, etc.)
- Is it used for _____? (writing, cutting, cooking, etc.)
- Does it have _____? (feathers, fur, scales, etc.)
- Does it live in _____? (the desert, our country, the water, etc.)
- Does it eat _____? (plants, bugs, animals, etc.)
- Does this worker _____? (help sick people, work with money, use a computer, etc.)
- Does this object belong _____? (in a desk, on the bookshelf, on the wall, etc.)

How to Play:

1. If necessary, review how to form questions using the words *is* and *does* with students as they will need to ask questions in this format during the game. (See the examples above.)
2. Tell students that they will each get a picture of something (such as an animal, classroom object, etc.), but will not get to see what it is. The picture will be taped to their back so they cannot see it.
3. Inform students that they will have a chance to ask up to twenty questions about the picture that is taped to their back by mingling with classmates. They should only ask each classmate one question (unless you have a small class). Students may not ask “Is it a (noun)?” about their picture. Instead, they must ask questions that help them collect information about the item pictured.
4. Students should copy a table like the one above into their notebooks or on a sheet of paper so that they can record the questions they ask and the answers classmates provide. All questions should be formed using *is* or *does*, and students can refuse to answer questions that are not formed properly.
5. If a student believes they know what the picture on his/her back shows, they must write down the name of the item, animal, occupation, etc. at the top of their list of questions and immediately find the teacher to see if they are correct. The teacher can determine if the student is correct and check their questions to be sure they are correct.
6. The first five students to quickly identify their pictures are the winners. The game may be repeated by collecting all of the pictures and redistributing them to different students, or by giving students a set of completely new pictures to wear in a second round.

7. The recording tables can also be collected and checked for accuracy and correct formation of questions by the teacher or in small groups or pairs. Common errors should be noted and reviewed.

The games presented this week can provide students with an opportunity to practice multiple grammar skills at the same time. To be successful, students have to draw upon knowledge of many different concepts at once. Therefore, these games are especially useful for reviewing multiple related skills. Try the Activate Games for Learning American English [Board Games](#) series and the American English Webinar [Out of Your Seat Grammar](#) for more great ideas!

Playing games in the English language classroom not only makes learning fun, but also encourages students to take risks and use language in authentic ways. Grammar is often taught and reviewed using worksheets or exercises from a textbook, but playing games can motivate and engage students in new ways. Try the activities presented in this month's Teacher's Corner and watch your students' grammar skills grow!