

1. Two Truths and a Lie

Level: Mid or high

Players: Whole class

Grammar Point: Used to, daily routines, present perfect, etc.

Time: 15-25 min

How to Play: Students think of three facts about themselves, 2 that are true and one lie. Remind the students that the lie can be the first, second or third sentence.

As a writing activity: each student writes down their name at the top of a sticky note and their three sentences below. Students walk around the room, putting a tick on the sentence they think is a lie. Then, students take turns revealing the correct answer.

As a speaking activity: Each student says their three sentences aloud, repeating if necessary. Next, hold a vote to see which sentence the other students think is the lie. The speaker can then reveal the correct answer.

Two Truths and a Lie can be used as an ice breaker activity to get to know students on the first day of class. It can also be used to review or produce a grammar point. Challenge the students to include a certain grammar point in their sentences (ex: used to, daily routines, present perfect, etc.)

2. What Are You Doing?

Level: Low or mid

Players: Whole class or small groups

Grammar Point: Present continuous

Time: 15- 25 min

How to Play: In this improve activity students can practice present continuous as well as vocabulary.

Form a circle with a student in the middle. The student will mime an action (cooking, sleeping, etc.). A student from the circle will ask "Hey (name), what are you doing?" The student in the middle of the circle replies with a different action, unrelated to the action they are miming. (ex: "I'm watching tv" while they mime that they are cooking.)

The student who asked the question then enters the circle and begins doing this action (following the example, they mime that they are watching tv), while the original student rejoins the circle.

Now, a new student asks the question "Hey (name), what are you doing?" and the activity continues. Encourage students to be creative in their verbs, and you are sure to get some laughs!

3. Big Red Balloon

Level: Low or mid

Players: Whole class

Grammar Point: Phonics or spelling

Time: 10 – 20 minutes

How to Play: Draw a picture of a hot air balloon on the board and announce to the class “I’m going up in a big red balloon and I’m bringing a _____.”

Depending on your grammar point (sound or spelling pattern), you will give an example of an item that fits your chosen pattern. For this example, let’s use double letters, so imagine I tell my students I’m bringing a tree.

Ask students to guess what else you are bringing by repeating the sentence “I’m going up in a big red balloon and I’m bringing a _____” and filling in the blank with their own example.

If their example matches your pattern, tell them “Yes, you are.” If their example doesn’t match the pattern, tell them “No, you aren’t.”

You will be met with confused looks at first, but eventually, it will click with a student or two! If your students aren’t quite getting it, give them a few examples to coax them along.

4. Boggle

Level: All levels

Players: Pairs or groups of 3

Grammar Point: Spelling or vocabulary

Time: 15-30 minutes

How to Play: Google “Boggle boards” and add them to PowerPoint slides, one board per slide. You can also create your own 4×4 grid if you prefer.

Explain that students need to form words using ONLY the letters they see. For higher levels, challenge them to create 4+ letter words or only words related to the vocabulary they are studying. For lower levels, tell them to form words with 2+ letters.

Set a time limit (5-10 minutes) and begin! Once the time is up, correct the lists by eliciting words from each team. Practice the alphabet by having groups spell out the words as you write them down on the board.

Each unique word counts for one point. The team with the most words wins! Switch partners and play again with a new board. This game can be a quick warmer, or you can really stretch it out into a 30-minute activity.

5. Compound Noun Tic Tac Toe

Level: Low or mid

Players: Whole class divided into two groups

Grammar Point: Compound nouns

Time: 15-20 min

How to Play: For this activity, prepare a list of compound nouns. For low levels, house-related words like: bedroom, toothbrush, bathroom, etc. are great, but you can play with any compound nouns you like.

Round 1: Draw a tic tac toe board on the board with the first half of a compound noun written in each square. Write up the matching second half of the compound nouns in a list along the side of the board in random order.

Designate one group as “X” and one group as “O.” Taking turns, groups match the nouns to create compound nouns while playing the game tic tac toe. If they are correct, mark their square with their team letter. First team to complete three in a row wins!

Round 2: Write up the first half of a compound noun, but DO NOT write up the second half. Play as before, but this time students need to think of possible endings.

6. Whisper Challenge

Level: All levels

Players: Pairs or groups of 3

Grammar Point: Vocabulary, vowel sounds, phrasal verbs etc.

Time: 15-20 min

How to Play: Choose the words you’d like to use and write them on small pieces of paper. If you have small whiteboards, give one to each team. If not, you can just use a blank piece of paper.

Have students stand on opposite sides of the room, across from one another. If you are playing with a group of three, one person will be opposite two people.

Give each “whisperer” a card. Give the other student(s) the whiteboard and a marker.

The “whisperer” must mouth the word or phrase on their paper without making any noise while their partner(s) tries to guess and write out the word or phrase. This is especially difficult if you have students with a variety of native languages.

Once everyone has guessed, switch whisperers and hand out new cards to continue the game.

7. Telephone and Writing Telephone

Level: All levels

Players: Whole class

Grammar Point: Telephone can be used with any grammar point and writing telephone practices describing pictures

Time: 15-20 min

How to Play:

Telephone:

Think of a sentence using the target language and whisper it into a student's ear. If they don't understand, they can ask you to repeat the sentence by saying "operator."

Next, this student will whisper the sentence into the next student's ear until all students have participated. The last student can either say the sentence or write it on the board.

If the sentence is completely different from the original one, you can try and track down where and how it changed, or just try again. Likewise, you can also break students into two groups and have them think of their own sentences based off of your model.

Writing telephone:

You'll need one paper for each student and a pen or pencil. Ask each student to write a sentence at the top of their paper. You can ask them to include specific vocabulary or grammar points in their sentence.

Once everyone is ready, ask students to pass the paper to their right. Now, they must read the sentence and try to draw it. Their drawing should be small and directly under the sentence.

Before passing the paper to the right again, make sure the students FOLD OVER the paper so that only the picture can be seen, and not the original sentence. Now, students must write a sentence based on the picture they see.

Continue the pattern until the paper is full. Then, unfold the paper to see how the sentence has changed! This one always gets lots of laughs and is great for any level!

8. Snowball

Level: All levels

Players: Whole class

Grammar Point: Asking questions, verb tenses, etc.

Time: 15-20 min

How to Play: For this activity, prepare a small piece of scrap paper for each student. Depending on your grammar point, ask a question and have students write their answers on the paper. Tell them NOT to write their name and try to disguise their handwriting if they know each other well. (Example: Grammar point: 2nd conditional... If you won the lottery, how

would you spend the money? Students might write something like “to travel” etc. on their paper).

Next, ask the students to crumple up their papers into ‘snowballs’ and throw them at you (kids love this) or at a target drawn on the board (adults love this). Now, it’s mingle time.

Instruct students to pick up one snowball each, and try to find the writer by asking a question. (Example: The paper says “buy a house” so the student asks another student “If you won the lottery, would you buy a house?” If the answer is yes, it’s a match! If not, they should keep looking until they find their match. Keep playing until all students have found their match.

9. Twenty Questions

Level: All levels

Players: Whole class, small groups or pairs

Grammar Point: Question forms, vocabulary sets

Time: 15-20 min

How to Play: A great activity for vocabulary building. Model the activity by telling students you are thinking of an animal. (This activity can be played with any vocabulary set like countries, occupations, etc.) They can only ask you “yes or no” questions. Review question forms if needed.

Tell them that you are keeping track of their guesses, and that they should work together to guess what the animal is before 20 questions are asked.

Once your students have guessed your word, you can continue to play as a whole class by having the student who guessed begin again with a new word or break up into smaller groups you can monitor.

10. Password, Taboo, and Hot Seat

Level: All levels

Players: Whole class or small groups

Grammar Point: Describing a word (could be a noun, adjective, verb, adverb), vocabulary

Time: 15 to 30 min

How to Play:

Password:

Place a chair in front of the board and ask a volunteer to sit looking away from the board. Tell students that you are going to write a word on the board and that they must give the student in the chair clues to help them guess the word.

Remind them that they can’t use any part of the word to describe it (example: if the word is airplane, they can’t say air or plane). Once the student guesses, have them choose another

volunteer and continue the game. Additionally, you can break students off into smaller groups and play with mini-whiteboards.

Taboo:

Similar to *Password*, except that students cannot say any of the words written on a short list of words connected with the word they need to guess. (Example: write “cake” in red. The student in the chair needs to guess this word. Below “cake” write “kitchen, cook, dessert and sweet” in black. These words are ‘taboo’ and cannot be said.)

Play the same as *Password*, making sure the students don’t say ANY of the words on the board. If they do, start again with a new word.

Hot Seat:

Once again, similar to *Password* except that you need to divide the students in half and place two chairs in front of the board. The students in the chairs should be close enough to their teammates to be able to hear them.

I like to play this with entire sentences. When a student thinks they have guessed the entire sentence, they need to raise their hand and repeat the sentence to you (without looking at the board first! They always want to turn around!)

If they are correct, award their team a point. If not, keep playing.

Tip: Encourage more advanced students to use the parts of speech and other clues to help their partner guess.