

Classroom Games: Effective Tools for New Teachers

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- I. When and why to play games**
- II. Vocabulary Games**
- III. Grammar/Conjugation games**
- IV. General/Review games**
- V. Online games**
- VI. Authentic games/realia**

Instructions for all the games I will talk about (and many, many more) are in the colored handout.

If you don't get a color packet, it is available in PDF form at:

<http://ms.loganhocking.k12.oh.us/~madame/teachers.html>

When and why to play games:

- Games help recruitment, retention, keep student enthusiasm high.
- Great for
 - drilling vocabulary or verb forms (memorization practice),
 - review for quizzes, tests,
 - to “relax” when you have finished a major assessment or project and
 - when there’s time left in the period or one day left before a break.

However...

- Games are not as effective (for me anyway) for
 - learning new material, or for
 - meaningful work on oral/listening/reading/writing skills.
- I do NOT play every day.
- When I DO play games, there are conditions:
 - We play AFTER we have finished other tasks planned for the period.
 - If we don’t get our other work done, we don’t play.
 - If the play gets out of hand, or isn’t working as an effective learning activity, I have alternatives on hand (worksheets, textbook exercises, etc.)
- What I do when students say: “Do we HAVE to play?”

Plan carefully...

- I generally try to avoid games where only one or two students are active at a time unless the action moves very quickly. Other students “check out” or chat and quickly lose interest.
- Similar problems arise when some students are eliminated early on while the others continue to play.
- If you have groups of students playing, how will you assure that they will stay in the target language or stay on task?
- Think ahead of time about what you will do in those situations if a game has that type of structure.

“Politics” of playing games in class

- What you need to make sure you have when administrators, supervisors, or parents ask about your use of class time to play games
 - Objectives/outcomes being addressed
 - Justification for the time spent
- Be sensitive to school and departmental norms. Some people object (sometimes strongly) to perpetuating an image of FL classes as “playtime” rather than serious academic study. Games may raise popularity of class, but it can also hurt the reputation of the class.
- Finally, there are some religious groups that object to competitive game playing. Be sensitive if this comes up in your community.

About playing games in class, from a message posted on FLTEACH Wed, 26 Jan 2005

First of all, there are “good games” and there are “bad games.” “Bad” games involve one or two students playing at a time while all of the rest are spectators. “Good” games (sometimes the bad games that have been restructured!) involve students (preferably) in pairs or (at the very least) in groups no larger than four in the game. The teacher circulates among the groups or serves as ringmaster for something like the flyswatter game played in pairs.

Secondly, some teachers believe that because one or two students can give the answers in a game that the students “seem to be learning.” Are the games helping the students produce the information in the way it is tested? Are the games only promoting low-level recognition skills? To be sure, there is a place in the instructional sequence to practice and reinforce recognition, but only as an intermediate step to higher-level “output” type activities.

Thirdly, and this is perhaps a bit more controversial, but putting yourself in the place of the students—sometimes it's difficult for students to make studying for classes that are all “fun and games” a priority. They get confused and think your desire to make things fun and entertaining means that you don't take the bottom-line learning seriously. This seems to be a difficulty encountered more frequently by inexperienced teachers who sometimes have a greater need for their students to like them. This is a danger that master teachers who skillfully incorporate games into the total picture, many of whom I know and respect, can avoid.

Like the great departed French Chef, Julia Child, always said about rich sauces and cooking with real butter, “Everything in moderation.”

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Speaking of FLTEACH, I owe many of the games I have listed in my handout to my fellow *listeros*. I can't remember who posted all of these originally, but I certainly wouldn't have such a wide repertoire of games if it weren't for that listserv. If you don't know FLTEACH, check it out at:

<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/>

Vocabulary Review And Practice Games

Bingo tips
Flash card games (Happy Face, Hold 'Em Up, Spelling bee style, etc.)
Fly swatter
I have __, who has ____
Numbers card game (*le Pauvre*, 99)
Pictionary
Scattergories
Scavenger Hunts
TPR—move around the room

Verb/Grammar Games

Dice games
Verb races

Review/General

Baseball
The Bomb game
Home-made board games—student made
Jeopardy

Online Games:

Quia.com — catalogued by language, textbook, topic, etc.

You can play games created by other teachers without registering and paying. If you want to create your own games, the registration is \$50

Puzzlemaker.com — **make your own puzzles, etc. to print out.**

Conjugemos.com — provides drill in conjugating regular and irregular verbs in many tenses. Can be reported to teacher

For French, try Thierry Perrot's *Jeu de l'oie*, a chutes and ladder-like board game on the web. More difficult is *olyfran*. Put either title in Google or the search field at www.merlot.org Also search *le point du fle* or *flenet* for games.

Authentic Games / Realia

I like to buy/learn games when I'm in France.

- *Sept familles* card decks
- *Milles bornes*
- *Pétanque/Boules* (I use bocce ball sets mostly)
- I use decks of cards from France when we play card games like *le Pauvre* (I got most of them free, for the asking, on Air France).