**10 Best Games for ESL Teachers**



Games and fun activities are a vital part of [**teaching English as a foreign language**](https://www.gooverseas.com/teach-abroad). Whether you’re teaching adults or children, games will liven up your lesson and ensure that your students will leave the classroom wanting more.

Games can be used to warm up the class before your lesson begins, during the lesson to give students a break when you’re tackling a tough subject, or at the end of class when you have a few minutes left to kill. There are literally hundreds, probably thousands, of games that you can play with your students. EFL games are used to test vocabulary, practice conversing, learn tenses - the list is endless.

This list of ten classic ESL games every teacher should know will help get you started and feeling prepared. Having these up your sleeve before stepping into the classroom will ensure your lessons run smoothly, and, should things get a little out of control, you’ll be able to pull back the attention of the class in no time.

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**1. Board Race**

There isn’t an [**EFL teacher**](https://www.gooverseas.com/blog/tips-worst-efl-teacher) I know who doesn’t use this game in the classroom. Board Race is a fun game that is used for revising vocabulary, whether it be words from the lesson you’ve just taught or words from a lesson you taught last week. It can also be used at the start of the class to get students active. It is a great way of testing what your students already know about the subject you’re about to teach.

* **Why use it?** Revising vocabulary; grammar
* **Who it's best for:** Appropriate for all levels and ages

**How to play:**

First, watch this helpful video of real teachers using this game in the classroom by[**BridgeTEFL**](https://www.gooverseas.com/organization/bridgetefl-reviews):

This is best played with 6 students or more - the more, the better. I’ve used it in classes ranging from 7-25 years of age and it’s worked well in all age groups. Here's a step by step explanation:

* Split the class into two teams and give each team a colored marker.
* If you have a very large class, it may be better to split the students into teams of 3 or 4.
* Draw a line down the middle of the board and write a topic at the top.
* The students must then write as many words as you require related to the topic in the form of a relay race.
* Each team wins one point for each correct word. Any words that are unreadable or misspelled are not counted.

**2. Call My Bluff / Two Truths and A Lie**



Call My Bluff is a fun game which is perfect at the start of term as a ‘getting to know you’ kind of game. It is also a brilliant ice breaker between students if you teach classes who do not know one another -- and especially essential if you are teaching a [**small class size**](https://www.gooverseas.com/blog/tips-for-teaching-english-abroad-in-small-groups).

The game is excellent for practicing speaking skills, though make sure you save a time for after the game to comment on any mistakes students may have made during the game. (I generally like to reserve this for after the game, so you don't disrupt their fluency by correcting them as they speak).

With older groups you can have some real fun and you might be surprised what you’ll learn about some of your students when playing this particular EFL game.

* **Why use it?** Ice-breaker; Speaking skills
* **Who it's best for:** Appropriate for all levels and ages but best with older groups

**How to play:**

* Write 3 statements about yourself on the board, two of which should be lies and one which should be true.
* Allow your students to ask you questions about each statement and then guess which one is the truth. You might want to practice your poker face before starting this game!
* If they guess correctly then they win.
* **Extension:** Give students time to write their own two truths and one lie.
* Pair them up and have them play again, this time with their list, with their new partner. If you want to really extend the game and give students even more time to practice their speaking/listening skills, rotate partners every five minutes.
* Bring the whole class back together and have students announce one new thing they learned about another student as a recap.

**3. Simon Says**

This is an excellent game for [**young learners**](https://www.gooverseas.com/teach-abroad/children). Whether you’re waking them up on a Monday morning or sending them home on a Friday afternoon, this one is bound to get them excited and wanting more. The only danger I have found with this game is that students never want to stop playing it.

* **Why use it?** Listening comprehension; Vocabulary; Warming up/winding down class
* **Who it's best for:** Young learners

**How to Play:**

* Stand in front of the class (you are Simon for the duration of this game).
* Do an action and say Simon Says [action]. The students must copy what you do.
* Repeat this process choosing different actions - you can be as silly as you like and the sillier you are the more the children will love you for it.
* Then do an action but this time say only the action and omit ‘Simon Says’. Whoever does the action this time is out and must sit down.
* The winner is the last student standing.
* To make it harder, speed up the actions. Reward children for good behavior by allowing them to play the part of Simon.



**4. Word Jumble Race**

This is a great game to encourage team work and bring a sense of competition to the classroom. No matter how old we are, we all love a good competition and this game works wonders with all age groups. It is perfect for practicing tenses, word order, reading & writing skills and grammar.

* **Why use it?** Grammar; Word Order; Spelling; Writing Skills
* **Who it's best for:** Adaptable to all levels/ages

**How to play:**

This game requires some planning before the lesson.

* Write out a number of sentences, using different colors for each sentence. I suggest having 3-5 sentences for each team.
* Cut up the sentences so you have a handful of words.
* Put each sentence into hats, cups or any objects you can find, keeping each separate.
* Split your class into teams of 2, 3, or 4. You can have as many teams as you want but remember to have enough sentences to go around.
* Teams must now put their sentences in the correct order.
* The winning team is the first team to have all sentences correctly ordered.

**5. Hangman**



This classic game is a favorite for all students but it can get boring quite quickly. This game is best used for 5 minutes at the start to warm the class up or 5 minutes at the end if you’ve got some time left over. It works no matter how many students are in the class.

* **Why use it?** Warming up / winding down class
* **Who it's best for:** Young learners

**How to play:**

In case you've never played, here's a quick rundown.

* Think of a word and write the number of letters on the board using dashes to show many letters there are.
* Ask students to suggest a letter. If it appears in the word, write it in all of the correct spaces. If the letter does not appear in the word, write it off to the side and begin drawing the image of a hanging man.
* Continue until the students guess the word correctly (they win) or you complete the diagram (you win).

**6. Pictionary**

This is another game that works well with any age group; children love it because they can get creative in the classroom, teenagers love it because it doesn’t feel like they’re learning, and adults love it because it’s a break from the monotony of learning a new language - even though they'll be learning as they play.

Pictionary can help students practice their vocabulary and it tests to see if they’re remembering the words you’ve been teaching.

* **Why use it?** Vocabulary
* **Who it's best for:** All ages; best with young learners

**How to play:**

* Before the class starts, prepare a bunch of words and put them in a bag.
* Split the class into teams of 2 and draw a line down the middle of the board.
* Give one team member from each team a pen and ask them to choose a word from the bag.
* Tell the students to draw the word as a picture on the board and encourage their team to guess the word.
* The first team to shout the correct answer gets a point.
* The student who has completed drawing should then nominate someone else to draw for their team.
* Repeat this until all the words are gone - make sure you have enough words that each student gets to draw at least once!

**7. The Mime**

Miming is an excellent way for students to practice their tenses and their verbs. It's also great for teachers with [**minimal resources**](https://www.gooverseas.com/blog/tips-for-teaching-with-limited-classroom-resources) or planning time, or teachers who want to break up a longer lesson with something more interactive. It's adaptable to almost any language point that you might be focusing on.

This game works with any age group, although you will find that adults tire of this far quicker than children. To keep them engaged, relate what they will be miming to your groups' personal interests as best as possible.

* **Why use it?** Vocabulary; Speaking
* **Who it's best for:** All ages; best with young learners

**How to play:**

* Before the class, write out some actions - like washing the dishes - and put them in a bag.
* Split the class into two teams.
* Bring one student from each team to the front of the class and one of them choose an action from the bag.
* Have both students mime the action to their team.
* The first team to shout the correct answer wins a point.
* Repeat this until all students have mimed at least one action.



**8. Hot Seat**

This is one of my students’ favorite games and is always at the top of the list when I ask them what they want to play. I have never used this while [**teaching ESL to adults**](https://www.gooverseas.com/teach-abroad/adults), but I imagine it would work well.

Hot Seat allows students to build their vocabulary and encourages competition in the classroom. They are also able to practice their speaking and listening skills and it can be used for any level of learner.

* **Why use it?** Vocabulary; Speaking and Listening
* **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

**How to play:**

* Split the class into 2 teams, or more if you have a large class.
* Elect one person from each team to sit in the Hot Seat, facing the classroom with the board behind them.
* Write a word on the board. One of the team members of the student in the hot seat must help the student guess the word by describing it. They have a limited amount of time and cannot say, spell or draw the word.
* Continue until each team member has described a word to the student in the Hot Seat.

**9. Where Shall I Go?**

This game is used to test prepositions of movement and should be played after this subject has been taught in the classroom. This game is so much fun but it can be a little bit dangerous since you'll be having one student in each pair be blindfolded while the other directs them. So make sure to keep *your* eyes open!

It is also excellent for the adult EFL classroom, or if you're [**teaching teenagers**](https://www.gooverseas.com/teach-abroad/high-school).

* **Why use it?** Prepositions; Speaking and Listening
* **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

**How to play:**

* Before the students arrive, turn your classroom into a maze by rearranging it. It's great if you can do this outside, but otherwise push tables and chairs together and move furniture to make your maze.
* When your students arrive, put them in pairs outside the classroom. Blindfold one student from each pair.
* Allow pairs to enter the classroom one at a time; the blindfolded student should be led through the maze by their partner. The students must use directions such as step over, go under, go up, and go down to lead their partner to the end of the maze.

**10. What’s My Problem?**

This is a brilliant EFL game to practice giving advice. It should be played after the ‘giving advice’ vocabulary lesson has taken place. It is a great way for students to see what they have remembered and what needs reviewing. This game works well with any age group, just adapt it to fit the age you’re working with.

* **Why use it?** Speaking and Listening; Giving Advice
* **Who it's best for:** All ages and levels

**How to play:**

* Write ailments or problems related to your most recent lesson on post-it notes and stick one post-it note on each student’s back.
* The students must mingle and ask for advice from other students to solve their problem.
* Students should be able to guess their problem based on the advice they get from their peers.
* Use more complicated or obscure problems to make the game more interesting for older students. For lower levels and younger students, announce a category or reference a recent lesson, like "Health", to help them along.

These games will keep your students engaged and happy as they learn! Remember, these are just ten on the hundreds of different EFL games that you can plat with your students. As you get more confident in the classroom, you can start putting your own spin on games and eventually make up your own.

Whatever the age of your students, they’re guaranteed to love playing EFL games in the classroom. An EFL classroom should be fun, active and challenging and these games are sure to get you heading in the right direction.