

# 10 ESL Vocabulary Games That Will Get Your Students Engaged

<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/esl-tefl-ell-vocabulary-games/>

*Things like building vocabulary are an essential part of learning English, but they can be dull. Spice up the classroom with some of these ESL vocabulary games to enhance the learning experience. They can make class time a little more exciting. You can use them to review previously learned words, but keep in mind that games also make great rewards for when your students do well in class.*

---

## Last Man Standing

This game is fast-paced, but allows students some time to think. It also encourages peer learning, as students will pick up on words they hear others speaking. To play the game, grab a ball and have all the students form a circle. Name a category or theme, such as things found in a kitchen, food, professions, and so on.

Begin by tossing the ball at a student. That student will shout a word related to the theme and throw the ball to another student. As each person catches the ball, they need to come up with another word that fits the theme. If they repeat a word that has already been said or can't think of a new one within a few seconds, they are out and must sit on the sidelines. Don't worry, they'll still be learning!

Take things up a notch with a different version of "Last Man Standing." Instead of naming a theme, each student gives the next student another theme. For example, you might start off with "something red." The first student to catch the ball could say "strawberry" and then choose another topic and throw the ball to the next student. This makes the game much more difficult, since students cannot think of a word until they know what their theme is.

---

## Categories

Students will beg to play this game once they get the hang of it! It's a great way to fill up the last few minutes of class, too.

Have students draw six columns on their paper and write a category at the top of each column. You can choose categories that fit what you've been studying in class or go with some basics. Popular categories include food, names, cities or countries, furniture, verbs and clothing.

Choose a random letter and write it on the board. Give students enough time to write down a word for each category that starts with that letter. You can repeat with new letters as many times as you like.

## Pictionary

Most English speakers are familiar with *Pictionary*, the drawing game. You can use the cards from the actual board game to create a classroom activity that will thrill your students. This is a good, high action game that students really get into.

**Chalkboard *Pictionary*.** To play in a classroom with many students, it's not very practical to use the game board. This means you'll be using the chalkboard or whiteboard at the front of the room.



Divide the class into two teams and create a small column for each team on one side of the board. You'll record their points here. Have one person from Team A come up to the front. Have the student draw a card (try using *Pictionary Junior* cards if the adult ones are too advanced for your class).

Alternatively, you can write words on slips of paper for students to choose.

The student must convey the word to his or her team using only drawings. Students cannot use words, symbols or hand gestures. Limit the time to three minutes maximum. Each correct word is a point and the first team to get 10 points is the winning team.

## Charades

Charades is quite similar to *Pictionary*, but it uses actions to communicate the secret word in place of photos. This is a great game for those days when your class is dragging and people are falling asleep. Get them up and get them moving!

Write down words on slips of paper for students to choose. Verbs are likely to be the easiest, but you can also use more complicated words, provided you are sure most of the students know them.



Divide the class into two teams and have one person from each team choose a piece of paper and act out the word. The teams must guess the correct word before three minutes run out. For each correct word, that team receives a point. The team that hits ten points first is the winning team.

---

## Taboo Words

Taboo Words helps students practice with synonyms and descriptions. Separate the class in half and have the two teams sit on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Each team will choose a person to sit in front of their team, facing them in the “hot seat.” You will stand behind the students and hold up a piece of paper with a word on it. The students in the hot seats will not be able to see these papers.

Teams have three minutes (or any amount of time you want to set) to get their hot seat member to say the word on the paper. The catch is, they *can't* say the word under any circumstances.

**Tips for playing in a large class.** If you have more than 12 students in a class, things can get a little chaotic with this game. In this case, it's usually simpler to divide everyone into teams of 5-6 people and have only one team go at a time.

---

## 20 Objects

Test your students' memories and vocabulary at the same time with this fun game. All you need is a clear desk and 20 common items from around the classroom. You can even grab things from your backpack or purse.

Arrange the objects on the desk and let students gather around to look at them. Cover everything with a sheet (or something similar) after one minute and send everyone back to their seats. Each student should write out as many items as they can remember on a piece of paper, all in English.

When everyone is done, write a list of the items on the chalkboard and allow students to self-correct. Alternatively, you can call out the objects and give a point for each one that is correctly written.

---

## Letter Scramble

Take a list of words that your students have recently learned and write a scrambled version of each on the board. Allow students to unscramble the words on their paper. The first one to finish deciphering all the words wins.



---

## Whiteboard Acrostic

Write a word vertically on the board and then have students come up, one at a time, to write a word starting with each letter of the vertical word. For example:

Cute

Under

Porcelain

Make this tougher by requiring the words to be related to the original vocabulary word.

---

## What Am I Thinking Of?

If you've ever played 20 Questions, you already know how this game goes. To make it a little easier on your students, however, you're going to include some visual clues.

Pair students up and have them think of an object. Each student should write 5-10 words describing the object on a piece of paper. When you call time, the students swap papers and try to figure out what the other person described. The first team to have both words guessed correctly wins.

---

## Word Bingo

You'll need to do a little preparation for this game, but it's well worth it. Make bingo sheets with a 4x4 grid and add words to each square. Hand these out (each one should be unique) and have students mark the correct word when you call it out. The first person to finish marking their entire page wins.

There are some fun variations to Word Bingo!



**Picture Bingo:** Use pictures on the Bingo card and call out the words that relate.

**Synonym Bingo:** Get those brains working by giving students a word that means the same thing as a word on their card.

**Antonym Bingo:** This is just as it sounds. Call out the antonyms of words on their cards and see how many students get it.