Top 10 ESL Review Games

Original content from Jackie Bolen

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1. Quiz Show Review Activity

Skills: Speaking/listening
Time: 30-45 minutes
Level: Beginner to Advanced
Materials: PowerPoint chart, or white board and questions.

This is a "Jeopardy" style quiz game, which is useful for kids all the way up to adults. It works especially well as a review game before a test. Although most teachers spend a lot of time making this game by using PowerPoint, it really isn't necessary and you can simply write up the grid on the whiteboard before class starts in less than a minute. It should only take you 5-10 minutes to prepare the questions if you're very familiar with the material so it really is a low-prep game.

Make up categories based on whatever you have been studying. For example: "Vocab, can/can't, movies, body." Think of questions that range from easy ($100) to difficult ($500). Put the students in groups of 3-4 and they have to pick their category and question. The students can pick whatever they want, but the key is that if they get it correct, they get the points. If wrong, they get minus that number. I put in a few +/- $500/$1000 and choose your own wager (up to $1000) to make it more interesting and give the lower level teams a chance to catch up.

Procedure:
1. Make a list of review questions. This depends on the number of categories but 25 works well (5x5). Make sure each team gets asked an equal number of questions.
2. Put students into teams of 3-4 and do rock-scissor-paper to see who goes first.

3. The first team chooses a category and a price. Ask them that question. If correct, they get the points. If incorrect, they lose those points.

4. Continue the game until all the questions are answered.

2. Small Group Board Games

Skills: Reading/speaking
Time: 25 minutes
Level: Beginner to Advanced
Materials: Board game sheet and marker for each student (a coin or eraser)

Board Games often come in the “teacher’s resource book” that goes along with your textbook and if this is the case, you’re in luck because no prep will be required but you’ll have a solid activity that your students will probably love and it has the added bonus of being extremely student-centered. However, not to worry if there isn't because it's easier than you might think to make your own and will only take 5-10 minutes once you get a bit of experience doing it.

Use questions based on the grammar and/or vocabulary that you’ve been studying during the previous classes. Have some fun squares, such as “Switch positions with the person on your right” or “Go back 5 spaces.” The style I typically use is a question of some kind where the student has to give one or two sentences in response to it. The other students in the group listen for incorrect answers, in which case the student has to move backwards the number that they “rolled.” You can use dice (which gets loud), two coins (2 heads= 4, 1 head +1 tail=3, etc), or a number sheet where students close their eyes and move their pen to choose a number.

Here are 2 board games that I use in my classes for “always” + “continuous” verbs and the simple past so you can get an idea of how easy it really is to make your own.
Always + Continuous Verb board game
Simple Past Board Game

Teaching Tips: dice are my least favorite way to "roll" because they fall off the desk and roll all around the room and they can also be very loud. Using coins or a paper sheet with a pen is much more controlled.

If students disagree about whether an answer is correct or incorrect, you can make a joke and tell them not to fight but just to ask you to be the referee. You should think carefully about your game though and make most of the questions easy enough that there are obvious correct answers. If not, your life will be very stressful if you have a big class and many groups playing at the same time.

Before I give the winner of each group a little prize, I'll often make them answer one or two final questions, which I usually take from the game board. It's a good way to review correct vocabulary or grammar use with the class in case any group has been off-base but you didn't catch it. A key component of learning language is hearing it and using it again, and again, and again. Help your students do this in class by doing quick reviews together at the end of activities.

Procedure:

1. Hand out the “game boards” as well as dice or coins to the groups of 3-5 students. Have each student provide their own token—it can be an eraser, a key or a small piece of paper.

2. The students can rock-scissor-paper to see who goes first. The first student uses the dice or coins to find the number of spaces they will move ahead. That student answers the question and if correct, they stay on that space but if incorrect, they move back the number of spaces that they rolled.

3. The next student rolls the dice and answer a question and so on.

4. The game continues until one student reaches the final square on the game
3. Rocks/Scissors/Paper

Skills: Reading/Speaking/Listening
Time: 20 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials: Question/Answer papers (~5/student)

Make up strips of paper with questions and answers (on separate papers). I use a table of 2 columns and however many rows you want. Put the question in the first column and the answer in the second to make sure everything matches. Then, cut up all the pieces. Give each student 5 papers. They have to walk around the class finding their “match.” Once they do, the students can Rock/scissor/paper and the winner takes both papers. The students with the most points are the winners, but check the answers carefully.

If you want to focus on speaking, you can make the rule that students are not to read each other’s papers but they have to do it only through speaking.

4. Tic/Tac/Toe

Skills: Listening/Speaking
Time: 15 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials: Whiteboard

This is a review game to play with the whole class. Make a 6x6 grid on the board. Each team gets a shape (X, O, $). You can ask a question and if correct, the team chooses a square. If they get 3 (or 4) in a row first, they are the winner.

Alternatively, if you want to make it more student-centered, you have students play in small groups. You’ll have to make up the grid with questions in it already. Then, put the students into 2 pairs of 2 and they can play against each other. The teacher acts as the referee in case of disagreement.
5. Race at the Board

Skills: Listening/Writing
Time: 20 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials: Whiteboard/1 marker for each team

Divide the class into 3 or 4 teams. One person from each team comes up to the board, in their allotted section. You ask a question and the first person to write the correct answer gets a point. Switch so that everyone has a chance to play. Keep track of how many points each team gets. This is an excellent game to use for shopping/where to buy things. The answers can be things like drugstore, pharmacy, department store, etc.

You can also make this into a spelling challenge. Say the word and the first person to spell it correctly gets the point.

6. Concentration

Skills: Reading
Time: 15 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials: Sets of matching papers, one per every 4 students.

Make a grid of 4x6. Put questions/answers on it. Or, you can use vocabulary/definitions. Cut them up and put them face down on the desk. In groups of 3-4, students choose two papers and see if they match. If they do, they take both papers out of the others and get one point. They can try to find another match. If the papers don’t match, the student returns to the papers to their original spots, face-down. Don’t mix the papers! It’s a memory game, not a random chance game. Then the next student chooses two papers and the game continues. The student with the most points wins.
7. Shootout at the ESL Corral

Skills: Listening/ Speaking
Time: 10-20 minutes
Level: Beginner
Materials Required: Nothing

This is a fun review game for kids. Divide the class into groups of two. You can do this on two sides of the class, at their desks standing up, or get the students to make a line at the front of the class.

The first two students play rock/scissor/paper. The loser has to answer a question about something you've been studying within five seconds. Prepare the questions beforehand and have them on a piece of paper, list-style. If correct, the student goes to the back of their line, or remains standing. If not, they sit down and the game is over for them. The person who won rock/scissor/paper stays in the game without having to answer a question.

8. Steal the Eraser

Skills: Listening/speaking
Time: 10-30 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials: 2 chairs, a table or desk, eraser

Divide the students into two teams. Have two desks at the front of the class, facing each other, with an eraser in the middle of the two desks. One student from each team comes and sits in the hot seat. Rotate through so that all the students get a chance to play at least once. You then ask a question of some sort, which you should have prepared beforehand unless you're really quick on your feet! The first person that grabs the eraser can try to answer the question. A helpful rule is that the student can take the eraser whenever they want, but the teacher only says the question once. And the teacher also stops talking as soon as the eraser is touched. Then, once the eraser is grabbed, count ten seconds down on your fingers and the student must answer the question within that time. If correct,
they get one point. If not, the other team gets a chance to answer the question. If both students are incorrect, you can ask a new question, or nobody gets a point and the next two players come up.

To make it even more exciting or if one team is behind by a lot of points, have a "Bonus Round," where the teams pick their best three players and each question is worth three points.

Here's an example of questions that I use for this game; they are very simple.

Steal the Eraser Game Questions

Procedure:
1. Prepare two desks facing each at the front of the class, with an eraser in the middle.
2. Divide students into two teams.
3. Each team sends up one person to the front and they sit in the desks.
4. The teacher asks a question (prepare the list beforehand), but stops speaking once the eraser is touched.
5. The first player to touch the eraser must answer the question within ten seconds.
6. If correct, they get one point and the next two people come up to the front.
7. If incorrect, the teacher reads the question one more time and the opposing player gets a chance to answer the question within ten seconds.
8. If correct, they get one point. If incorrect, both players sit down and the next pair come up.
9. Continue until all students have had a chance to play.

9. The World Cup

Skills: Speaking/Listening
Time: 15 minutes
Level: Beginner to Intermediate
Materials Required: A World Cup “Draw”

First, make up some questions. Review things work well but add in a few random questions to keep it interesting. Then, make up a "draw." You know, the round of 16, quarter-finals, semis and the final. If
you have an odd number and it doesn't quite work, make up some "last-chance spots" with all the people who lost their game in the section of the draw can compete against each other for the last spot. Write up student's names in the draw randomly. To add some more fun, and for smaller classes you can get students to pick a country. For bigger classes, wait until the semi-finals before you allow country picking.

Anyway, ask the students a question from your list and the person to answer the fastest gets to move onto the next round. That's it! Simple, exciting and fun.

10. Odd One Out

Skills: Reading/Writing
Time: 10 minutes
Level: Intermediate to Advanced
Materials: Nothing

This is a game that you can play to review vocabulary from the previous lessons. Write up a few sets of vocabulary words on the board. I usually write four in one group, with one of them being the odd one out.

Example: apple, carrot, orange, banana

The students have to choose the odd one out and say why: carrot-it's a vegetable, not a fruit. It’s best if they do this through writing so you can check answers easily and quickly.

Original content from Jackie Bolen: My Life! Teaching in a Korean University