

# ESL GAME IDEAS

## Page 2

### Word Grab with Songs

**Level:** Any Level

This is a wonderful activity if you think your class needs waking up a little. Choose a song that the students have or have not heard before. Choose 10-15 pieces of vocabulary from the song and write them on separate pieces of paper. With lower level groups you may want to pronounce the words with the students first. Stick each word to the board with putty (blue tack). Put the students into 2 teams each one in a line before the board. Play the song. When the 2 students at the front of their line hear a word in the song that is on the board they must race each other to grab that word from the board (this can get quite violent!). They then go to the back of the line and it's up to the next pair. The team with the most words wins.

I don't usually stop the tape so don't choose words that come one after the other. If you want to make it more difficult you can put red herrings up. You can usually play the song a couple of times until they get all the words.

Submitted by Nicola Turner

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### Is Your Conversation Style Feminine or Masculine?

**Level:** Medium

The following activity is loosely based on Conversation Analysis readings, so nothing is hard and fast doctrine. It seeks to be thought-provoking and there may be a grain of truth in some of the statements below. Remember also that men and women express themselves differently according to the make-up of the conversation group. That is, the group may be mixed gender, all male or all female, hence the type of exchanges will be different-the atmosphere too. Furthermore, the group may be friends, work-mates, academics, a meeting ....

If nothing else, it should generate chat.

Put yes (Y) or no (N) for the sentences below.

Generally speaking, when I converse with people I know:

- I am a blunt person
- I criticise people
- I am a little sarcastic
- I ask a lot of questions in a conversation, to find out about people, their thoughts, etc
- I rarely admit I am wrong about something when I am in a conversation
- I make eye-contact and use body language in conversations
- I generalise
- I get personal with people in conversations; I may even gossip about a mutual friend
- I compliment people spontaneously
- I use four-letter words, coarse language
- I like to talk about myself
- I am a good listener
- I prefer to talk about non-personal topics, such as unemployment, the economy, current affairs ...
- I usually talk about personal problems, people, their way of being, hopes, desires, my family ...
- I get personal when I write a letter to someone, but not face to face in a conversation
- I help to keep a conversation flowing, I am not provocative, controversial, confrontational ...
- I like to get my say, get in a few comments, no matter what the topic
- I don't assert something, but I might preface a comment with "I think, I suppose, perhaps"
- I talk a lot
- If I ask a question, it is generally a yes-no answer I am looking for
- I don't mind talking about a situation where I was embarrassed, humiliated and so on

**\*\* Results \*\*** (A personal view)

Men, it is said, are more assertive, sarcastic, long-winded, non-personal and so on, while women are collaborative, personal and happy to take a back seat in many chats-it is said. So, working on the previous assertions-and more-you can score the test the following way:

4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 21 would be more feminine traits-generally speaking The rest, male.

Once again, the activity should not give rise to aggressive exchanges.

Submitted by Gerard Counihan

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## A Conversation Idea - Rate the Apparatus

**Level:** Medium

### Activity A

The many household apparatus/machines/gadgets we use at home make life a little bit easier; the micro-wave oven heats things up quickly; the fridge keeps perishable goods fresh; the washing-machine cleans our clothes and saves us time. So, when put to the test, which of these machines/apparatus could we do without-IF WE HAD TO. In other words, which of these machines is the most important, generally speaking. Get your students to make a list of ten common ones, and then get them to list them in order of perceived necessity (for want of a better word). Here is a list I gleaned from my pupils, don't show it to the pupils at first.

Refrigerator

Washing machine

Shower

Toilet

Tea/Coffee maker

TV

Radio

Telephone

Light bulb

Cooker

Of course, these items must be rated according to perceived necessity, and the rating must be justified. Reasons for a choice must be given. Students will debate the "top" necessity and so on, down to the least important item.

### Activity B

Are these things necessary?

The activity A could branch out into further items we use to make life easier and, presumably, make life better. For example:

Perfume  
Hair driers  
Mirrors  
Walkman  
Cigarette lighters  
Special wine glasses  
Mobile telephones  
Curtains  
Expensive furniture  
Sweets and savouries  
Etc ...

The idea is not to embark on an ethical crusade, but simple to get people thinking and speaking in English. All of this is, crucially, backed up by realistic reasons for the comments made. Some of the items above are by no means original, but they are everyday things which are part and parcel of our lives.

Can you think of more normal, common-or-garden items which could be dispensed with?

Submitted by Gerard Counihan

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## **A Conversation Idea - How Do You Kill Time?**

**Level:** Medium

Here is a simple idea to generate chat among your students. We all know that there are moments during the day when we have nothing to do, no plans. For example, when you are waiting for a teacher, a friend and so on. How do we occupy these periods of time, either mentally or physically? For example:

Activity A

What do you do during the TV advertisements?

Make a list of what the students say

(My students got these)

Talk to my sister  
I read something, anything  
I get up and do something  
I go to the bathroom (!)  
I change channels  
I look for something to eat or read  
I call a friend  
I water the plants  
I put on some food for the next day  
I phone Pizza Hut  
I put the children to bed  
I brush my teeth  
I unload the washing machine/put clothes on line  
I rush to do the washing-up

You can also get the students to tick off the ones which they regularly do and check the most common activities

### Activity B

Ways to pass the time/occupy your mind/self when you are:

In a bus queue  
Waiting at a supermarket check-out  
In a doctor's waiting-room  
Waiting for your boy/girlfriend on a cold day-outdoors  
In a cinema/theatre, waiting for the film/play  
In a traffic jam  
In an airport/train station  
In a lift/elevator  
Getting your hair done/cut  
Etc ...

Submitted by Gerard Counihan

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## **Tell me about myself**

**Level:** Any Level

This game works well with students at pre-intermediate level or above and can be adapted accordingly. It is an original way of introducing yourself (as a teacher) to a class for the first time, but could also be used later on.

Prepare in advance, on an overhead transparency or white-board, a mind map of yourself. Instead of using sentences to describe your life, use single words, numbers, dates, symbols and illustrations where possible.

For example I include information about my life in England, names of siblings, date of birth, name of hometown etc. (My hometown is Stoke-on-Trent which I then illustrate with a cup and saucer - the Potteries, and a football - Stoke City FC. It keeps them guessing.)

I include information about my husband (name and illustration of job) children (names, ages, birthdays). You can add your shoe size, height, illustrations of your hobbies etc. I draw a needle and thread - sewing, a pair of skis - I enjoy skiing, and a pencil - drawing.

Any kind of information can be included. Use your imagination! I live in Sweden and draw a picture of a snowman with a cross through it to illustrate that I don't like the winter!

Get your students to tell you what the information means. For example.

- July - is that when your birthday is?
- Does the cup and saucer mean you drink tea?

Try and get a good mix of obvious and less obvious information. For example, when I drew a fish (to illustrate that I kept tropical fish) it provoked questions like:

- Do you eat a lot of fish?
- Do you enjoy fishing?
- Is your star sign pisces?

Give them a clue if they're having problems guessing.

This game has worked wonderfully for me in many classes of varying levels. To follow up, get you students to take a few minutes to prepare something similar individually, and then work in pairs guessing what the information means about their partner.

Submitted by Dawn Garnheim, Sweden

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**People Who ...**

**Level:** Any Level

An activity whose aim is to complete sentences and also take advantage of the contributions in order to generate debate and interaction.

How: Just hand out the following sheet with the heading

PEOPLE WHO ...

and tell the students they have to complete the sentences with realism-not just adding on a grammatically correct ending.

PARK THEIR CARS ON THE FOOTPATH ...

WHO DON'T PAY TAX ...

WHO THROW LITTER ON THE GROUND ...

WHO GIVE MONEY TO CHARITIES ...

EAT CRISPS AT THE CINEMA ARE ...

WHO DRINK AND DRIVE ...

WHO TRAVEL A LOT ...

WHO SAVE LOTS OF MONEY ...

WATCH TV ALL DAY ...

GO TO THE OPERA ...

EAT FROG'S LEGS ...

CLIMB EVEREST ...

HUNT WHALES ...

EAT TOO MUCH ...

DRIVE TOO FAST ...

JUMP QUEUES ...

WHISTLE AT GIRLS ...

SMOKE IN PUBLIC SPACES ...

EARN A LOT OF MONEY ...

THROW THEIR OLD COOKER INTO A FIELD ...

SNORE ...

Etc ..... (Add more!)

NB: The idea is to get personal, individual endings. For example, for

"People who eat crisps in the cinema ...",

I got:

annoy me

should eat them before the show

make a lot of noise

have a right to do so (!)

As you can see, everybody has a different answer-and opinion. The latter is what generates talk.

So you kill two birds with one stone: You practise grammar and you get students talking.

Submitted by Gerard Counihan

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## **FLY SWAT!**

**Level:** Any Level

Divide your class into 2 groups.

Choose 2 ss. and ask them to go to the back part of the classroom and turn back.

Display on the blackboard 20 vocabulary words and over 10 of them paste "flies" made of cardboard paper with a piece of velcro on them.

Give both ss. a fly swatter with the other side of velcro on them.

The objective on the game is that you will say a word and ss. will turn back and run to

"fly swat" the word that has the bug over it. The ss. who "kills" the fly has to spell the word and then he will score a point for his team.

With the fly swatter and the velcro flies, you can invent many different games. Try it!!!

I've worked with 4, 5 and 6 graders and they love this game.

Submitted by Guillermo Flores Grajales

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## **pop**

**Level:** Medium

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## **Name Six**

**Level:** Any Level

This game is fun and challenging at the same time. It can be adapted for virtually any subject and any grade level. It allows the students to review material they've learned, without having to get out a pencil and paper and answer questions from the text.

- Arrange 6 chairs in a circle and choose one person, the teacher or another student, to stand outside the circle.
- Give someone in the circle a stuffed animal, the funnier the animal the better!
- The person outside the circle states what the person holding the animal has to name six of.
- The person then starts moving the animal around the circle and the other players pass it around.
- The player must name six of the objects before the animal gets back to him or her.

For example, let's say that you have just finished a vocabulary unit on animals. The person standing outside the group may say something like, "Name six animals that have fur." The person sitting in the circle begins naming six animals and at the same time, the stuffed animal is being passed around the circle. If the player cannot name 6 animals with fur by the time the stuffed animal reaches him, he has lost and it's his turn to stand outside the group and stunt the other students.

My students absolutely love this game and so do I because it requires no prep time!! It may take the students a few times before they become successful at the game, but eventually I'm sure it will become one of their favorites. I hope you have as much

success with Name Six as I have had.

Submitted by Sammie Leyder

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## **Career Letters**

**Level:** Medium to Difficult

My high school students have enjoyed this activity very much. It helps them think about more possibilities for a future career and is a great writing activity. They also learn how to write a business letter by writing a real letter.

Many ESL students have limited knowledge of career possibilities. Far too many think only in terms of becoming a mechanic or a secretary. So first you discuss with them some of the opportunities they have.

Students choose a career field and then write a letter to a school requesting information about that field. It could be anything from astronomer (local or out-of-town university) to electrician (technical institute) to travel agent (yes, there are travel agency schools!)

You help them perfect the letters and mail them out. When they get a reply, share it with the class.

Submitted by Dale Garratt

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## **Learning Months of the Year**

**Level:** Easy

To teach younger ESL students (K-3) the months of the year, take laminated pictures representing the months:

January-snowman

February-heart

March-shamrock

April-umbrella/bunny/Easter egg

May-flowers

June-sun/watermelon

July-flag

August-sailboat/?????

September-apple/schoolhouse  
October-pumpkin  
November-turkey  
December-Christmas tree/Menorrah

Have the students tell you which picture goes with each month, or put the pictures in order by month

Submitted by Jeannie LaFlame

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## **Personal Survey**

**Level:** Easy to Medium

Here is a light-hearted idea to get pupils talking in conversation class. I have adapted an idea I found in a gossip magazine.

### **TEACHER TIP**

Get your students to fill out this mini survey. You can ask them questions at the end of the exercise or go through the answers as they are made. Obviously, you don't dwell on the "childhood" question too much-it's meant to be a bit of fun. But you should get some mileage from the "white lies" one.

### **PERSONAL SURVEY**

Did you have a happy childhood?

When do you tell white lies? Tell us one.

The most capable person in your country?

Favourite novelist?

Proudest moment?

Worst moment? (last week if necessary)

Most hated song/music at the moment?

The last piece of music you bought?

Were you good at school?

The greatest influence on you? (parents, friends ...)

Current bedside reading material?

Where will you go when you die?

What do you admire most about yourself?

One of your main faults?

A small crime you once committed? (anything at all)

Music you would like played at your funeral?

Submitted by Gerard Counihan

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## **My Town**

**Level:** Any Level

Activity A

Do you like the town/city you live in? Why? Why not?

Activity B

Teacher makes a list of the positive points mentioned by the pupils. Discuss common and original comments.

Activity C

Teacher makes a list of negative comments about towns/cities mentioned

Activity D

**THE PERFECT TOWN/CITY:**

The class now makes a list of the characteristics of a perfect town/city. For example, these could include:

Bicycle paths  
No smoke  
No cars  
Sports facilities  
No violence  
Beautiful buildings  
Culture

### Activity E

Compare your town/city with another one you know, and make a list of the comments.  
Some examples:

My town is noisier than X, because ...  
My city is more boring than Y, because ...

You can go on to mention aspects such as

Pollution  
Poverty/Wealth  
Green areas  
Amenities  
Transport  
Health  
Crowding  
Cost of living  
Selfishness ...

### Activity F

The best town/city you have ever been to/seen?

Submitted by Blabla Profesor Donosti

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## **Class Mixer**

**Level:** Any Level

This game can be played with a range of different levels. It can be used purely as a mixer/ice breaker or can be adapted to reinforce target gambits, grammar or vocabulary by directing the 'chat' portion of the game. This game is essentially an adaption of the old 'Who am I?' game. Start with a 'chat' either in rotating groups or in an interview format. This portion sets the level and focus of the game. For example a

low intermediate class might be instructed to ask all of their classmates a series of "Have you ever...?" questions. A more advanced group might be told to talk to all their classmates about a certain topic, leaving the specific questions up to them. With a lower level group I find a note taking form to be useful. After the chat portion, do the 'who am I' game using your students' names. They must use the same target language to ask yes/no questions and find out who they are.

Submitted by Michelle Harkness

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## **Add a Word**

**Level:** Any Level

**Rationale:** Students practise grammar and syntax.

**Materials:** None.

**Levels:** All levels, though better for more advanced students, because the game is more fun at a quick pace.

**Method:** One student begins a sentence by saying only one word. A second student must say a word which continues the sentence. A third must continue, and so on, until someone says a word that does not fit syntactically or grammatically. If the sentence comes to a logical end without error, the next student may say "period" and begin a new sentence with a new word.

The teacher may suggest a topic to get things started. What the students say may also be recorded and played back, so the class can discuss the error that stopped the sentence.

**Example:**

Teacher: The topic is 'pets'.

First student: "My . . ."

Second student: ". . . dog"

Third student: ". . . has . . ."

Fourth student: ". . . spots . . ."

Fifth student: ". . . brown . . ."

The sentence would stop here. The teacher would ask the students why, hoping someone explains that the adjective 'brown' normally comes before and not after the

noun 'spots'.

Submitted by Stephen MacDonald

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## **Time Indicators**

**Level:** Any Level

**Rationale:** Students practise using different subject pronouns, verb tenses, and the time words and phrases that go with them. They must also be able to recognize different forms of the same verb, especially irregular verbs.

**Materials:** None.

**Levels:** All. Beginners can play using only four verb tenses (present, past, future, and present progressive). More advanced can play using all the tenses.

**Method:** One student says a time word or phrase (e.g. next year, a few days ago). A second student must complete a sentence using the proper verb tense. That student then says a different time word or phrase. A third student uses it to form a sentence, but may not use the same verb or subject pronoun the second student used.

Verb tenses may be repeated if necessary, but verbs may not, and subject pronouns may be repeated only after they have all been used once.

The game can continue as long as the teacher wants, though two runs through all the subject pronouns is an appropriate length. The teacher may write the full sentences on the board, but should at least keep track of which subject pronouns and verbs have been used.

**Example:**

First student: "At the moment . . ."

Second student: ". . . I am sitting in a classroom."

Second student: "Last year . . ."

Third student: ". . . they went to Europe."

Third student: "Every day . . ."

Fourth student: ". . . she takes the bus to work."

Submitted by Stephen MacDonald

