Game On in 2018: 2 Grammar Games to Engage ELLs

by Elinor Westfold and Loren Lee Chiesi

Grammar can induce dread or—worse—boredom in English language learners (ELLs). In 2018, resolve to make learning grammar more fun for your students. Playing games during grammar class is one of the easiest ways to motivate ELLs to practice challenging grammar structures. Games help students focus on grammatical forms in meaningful contexts and build automaticity. Furthermore, playing games in our classrooms helps our diverse students collaborate more effectively (Chen, 2005; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006).

We developed the following two games to help our high intermediate and advanced writing students practice accurately using subordinate clauses. However, they can easily be adapted to many levels and contexts.

Game 1: Adjective Clause Matching

This 30-minute activity motivates ELLs to write accurate adjective clauses connected to pictures. Students then use their own sentences to play a fast-paced and kinesthetic game that rewards rapid reading skills and repeatedly exposes students to correct adjective clauses.

Materials

- A PowerPoint presentation with high-interest pictures (see a sample presentation in PowerPoint or PDF [below])
- Index cards
- A table at the front of the classroom

Step 1

Put students in groups of three or four. Tell students that they are going to play a game and that they will create sentences with adjective clauses, which will be materials for the game.

Step 2

Using the PowerPoint, show the students a picture and model a sentence about the picture that contains an adjective clause. For example, show the sentence, "This is a cow that can relax." paired with an image of a sitting cow.

Step 3

Show students a slide with three to four pictures in on it (Figure 1). Tell each group or each student to choose just one picture from the slide and write a sentence about it on an index card. Each index card should have only one sentence. While students write, circulate and help them check their grammar. Repeat this step with four or five picture slides, and then ask the students to place all index cards on a table at the front of the classroom so that their sentences are clearly visible.



Figure 1. Example slide for "Adjective Clause Matching" game, Step 3.

Step 4

Each group sends one student to the front of the classroom. These students stand around the table with their hands behind their backs. Project a slide with just one picture on it (Figure 2). Students look at the picture and then read the cards and try to grab the card or cards that best match the picture. If multiple cards match one picture, one student can grab all of them or multiple students can grab different cards. Each card is worth one point. The students then read their cards aloud so that the class can confirm their answers. The students bring their cards back to their groups as evidence of their points.



Figure 2. Example slide for "Adjective Clause Matching" game, Step 4.

Step 5

After the first round, a new representative of each group comes to the table. These new students repeat Step 4.

Continue repeating Steps 4 and 5 until all the index cards have been used or the class has run out of time. The rounds go quite quickly as students become accustomed to the game and eager to have their chance at the table. The group that has successfully grabbed the most cards wins. As an extension, ask students to discuss which sentences described their pictures most effectively, or ask them what the game has taught them about the function of adjective clauses.

Picture Selection Variation

This game can also be played with copies of pictures instead of a PowerPoint. In Step 3, each student selects a picture, printed on sturdy paper or laminated, and writes a sentence about it. The teacher then reads or projects the sentences, and the students select pictures instead of sentences.

Adaptations for Lower Levels

Teachers can adapt this game to help learners practice other kinds of descriptive language. Lower levels can write sentences with adjectives or prepositional phrases. Higher levels can use participial phrases. You can also scaffold by providing main clauses to which students can add adjective clauses, such as, "This is a person who..." "This is a place where..." or "This is a thing that...."

Game 2: Noun Clause Trivia

Trivia games are an enjoyable way to engage a variety of student strengths, such as content knowledge, speed, and, of course, grammar skills. Trivia can be easily adapted to incorporate themes from a unit in a textbook, core vocabulary, target skill practice, or the content of a reading assignment. In this 20-minute game, students repeatedly practice forming noun clauses from wh- questions. Rather than being tedious, this repetition becomes thrilling.

Materials

- A PowerPoint presentation with *wh* questions related to class content or to interesting facts about students' home countries (see a sample presentation in PowerPoint or PDF [below])
- A piece of lined paper for each group
- A whiteboard or blackboard

Step 1

Students sit in groups of three to four, and each group chooses a writer. Tell students that they are going to play a trivia game, and that they will need to use noun clauses to respond to the questions.

Step 2

Show a PowerPoint slide with a *wh*– question, such as, "What is the longest river in India?" (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Example slide for "Noun Clause Trivia," Step 2.

Step 3

With the help other group members, the writer of each group races to write two sentences:

- 1. We know/we don't know + a noun clause.
- 2. The answer, as a full sentence.

For example, as an answer to the question in Step 2, students might write: "We know what the longest river in India is. The longest river in India is the Ganges."

Step 5

When a group agrees on the answer, all students in the group should raise their hands. Call on one member of the group. Students do not know who will be called on, so they must all be ready to respond with the correct answers. The selected student then reads the two sentences aloud. A group can get a maximum of two points for each question: one for a correctly formed noun clause and another for the correct answer. If they correctly form a noun clause, such as, "we don't know what the longest river in India is," but do not know the correct answer, they can still earn one point. Record each group's points on the whiteboard or blackboard. The group with the most points at the end of class or at the end of the PowerPoint presentation wins. To reflect on student learning, initiate discussion on what the game illustrates about the form and function of wh— noun clauses.

Variations

This game is easy to adapt to encompass more types of noun clauses. The PowerPoint can include yes/no questions instead of, or in addition to, *wh*– questions. For a more challenging activity, students can write their second sentence using reported speech, such as, "We think that the longest river in India is the Ganges."

Teachers can also collect answers in a variety of ways, depending on the size and layout of their classrooms. With a small class or a class sitting in a half circle, give students 2 minutes to write answers to each question and then quickly check each group. This means that every group can get points for each question, which heightens the competition and sense of achievement. Students can also compete individually by quickly writing answers on the board.

Students can play "Wheel of Fortune style." In this case, Group 1 gets the first opportunity to answer the first question, but, if they are wrong, Group 2 can "steal" the question by responding correctly. Group 2 then starts with Question 2. In this case, give students a brief pause to confer with their group mates before giving them a chance to answer.

Based on student feedback and our own teaching experiences, these games increase our students' confidence and enjoyment in using the target grammar. When students are actively using the grammar for a defined purpose, they are more creative, efficient, and motivated to recognize and emend their mistakes and those of their classmates.

References

Chen, I. (2005). Using games to promote communicative skills in language learning. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(2). Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Chen-Games.html

Wright, A., Betteridge, D., & Buckby, M. (2006). *Games for language learning*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

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Adjective Clause Matching

Created by: Elinor Westfold and Loren Lee Chiesi

Objective

Create and recognize adjective clauses.

Part 1: Write Sentences

- You will see groups of three pictures.
- Choose a picture.
- Quickly write your own sentence about the picture on your card in dark pen and BIG LETTERS. Use an adjective clause in your sentence.



- Give your card to your teacher when you finish.
- We will use your sentences to play a game.

Ex: This is an elephant that can fly.

Choose one picture. Write a sentence with an adjective

clause about it.







Choose one picture. Write a sentence with an adjective clause about it.







Choose one picture. Write a sentence with an adjective clause

about it.







Part 2: Match your sentences to a picture

- Send 1 team member to the table.
- Put your hands behind your back.
- I will show you a picture.
- Grab the card that matches the picture.
 - More than one card may match!
- Read your card aloud so that we can check it. If you are correct, keep the card.
- Send up a new teammate and repeat.
- The team with the most cards wins!

Let's play!



The Great Wall, China





Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, CA, USA







Xochimilco, Mexico







Noun Clause Trivia

Created by: Elinor Westfold and Loren Lee Chiesi

Photos by: Elinor Westfold and Loren Lee Chiesi

Objective

Form noun clauses from wh- questions

Step 1: Look at the question

Example: What is the capital of Australia?

Step 2: Respond with two sentences

- Each group should write 2 responses for each question.
 - 1: We know/ don't know + noun clause
 - 2: Your answer, as a FULL SENTENCE
- Example:
 - 1: We know what the capital of Australia is.
 - 2: The capital of Australia is Canberra.

Step 3: Get points

- When you are sure about your answers and everyone in your group agrees, all students in the group should raise their hands.
- Your teacher will call on only ONE person to answer the question.
- This person should read both sentences.
- Scoring: 2 points possible for each question
 - 1 for the correct sentence with a noun clause.
 - 1 for the correct answer to the trivia question in a full sentence.
- The team with the most points wins!

What is the longest river in India?



What is the *second* most common language in the U.S.?

(most common = spoken at home by the most people)

Which country is the biggest in the world? (In terms of area, not population)

Where is this?



Who designed this pyramid?



What is capital of Tajikistan?



What are these animals?

