

Laugh and Learn

by Jerry Steinberg

Bill, a former student of mine, once confessed, "Every time we sang a song, listened to one of your corny jokes, or played a game (all in the target language, of course), we thought we were just fooling around and not working. Then, I realized that everyone was paying attention and participating, and that as much learning was taking place during the fun times as during the formal lesson. We were laughing *and* learning. You tricked us!"

You're right, Bill. I did trick you. And in doing so, I made learning more fun for you, and teaching more fun for me.

The Pedagogical Value of Games

Everyone knows that games are fun, but some people think that they are *only fun*—lacking any pedagogical value. Not so! Games are a viable (and enjoyable) method of achieving many educational objectives. For example:

I use games to **reinforce** newly acquired information, immediately after it has been taught.

Days, weeks, months, even years after something has been taught, a game is a delightful way to **review** that material.

A game makes an excellent **reward** to encourage students to co-operate (or to thank them for co-operating) during less enjoyable activities.

After a grueling oral drill, or other energy-draining exercise, a quiet game is a fun way to **relax**.

Games tend to **reduce inhibition**, especially if the competitive element is diminished or eliminated. The shy or linguistically weak student will feel more at ease and will participate more freely, if the object is just to have fun, and not to score points and

win. Although competition often adds excitement and increases participation, it also intensifies the pressure to perform well, thereby excluding the timid student and the one who is less sure of his facility with the language.

No matter how dynamic a teacher you are, there are bound to be occasional general lapses in attention. A short, snappy game will **raise attentiveness**, revive the class, and make them more receptive to further learning.

A game provides the teacher with a method of **rapid rectification** of students' errors. Correcting errors immediately prevents them from becoming deeply rooted in students' memories.

Students tend to remember best the things they enjoyed doing. Hence, games **aid retention**.

Playing games takes the drudgery out of learning and, thus, **provides motivation**.

Students are very co-operative during games, since no one wants to risk being responsible for bringing a pleasurable activity to a premature end. Consequently, games help to **restrain rebellion**.

When to Play Games

Games can be played at any time. I frequently play a short game with my students at the beginning of the lesson, especially on Mondays, to welcome them back, refresh their memories, and warm them up for learning new material. You know only too well how much can be forgotten over the weekend, and how difficult it is to "get their motors started," particularly on Mondays. What better way to review last week's (or yesterday's) learning than by playing a game which requires students to recall and use that information repeatedly?

Also, occasionally, I will interrupt a lesson to play a short, snappy game when I find students' attention waning. I then return to the lesson with alert and attentive students.

Saving a game for the end of the session also has its advantages. It will encourage students to co-operate during the lesson and, by ending on a "high note," it may entice them to return for the next session.

In summary, the best time to play a game is *any time* that a game will benefit your students.

Game Essentials

Here are three important things I look for in games to play with my students:

1. **Ease of Explanation:** The rules of a game should be few and simple. If you are fortunate enough to be able to speak the background (native) language(s) of all of your students, I would suggest you take a few minutes to explain the game in that/those language(s) and use the remaining time to play the game. (I would rather spend a few minutes explaining the game and have lots of time left over to play it, than use up all the time explaining it in the target language and have no time left to play.)

If you cannot communicate with students in their own language(s), use the simplest vocabulary possible, utilizing lots of visual aids and giving lots of concrete examples to ensure comprehension.

2. **Absence of expensive or complicated materials.**
3. **Versatility:** I like games that can easily be adapted to suit the number, age, and linguistic level of my students.

Optimal Group Size

During my demonstrations of linguistic games for the language class, teachers have often expressed the concern that it is next to impossible to play games with classes of 30 to 40 (or more) students.

Although some games are well-suited to large groups (YES/NO PING-PONG, LETTERGORY and WHAT'S NEW?, to name a few), to ensure *total* involvement and participation of *all* students, teams of no more than 10 students are recommended. This enables each and every student to take an *active* part in the game and to contribute to his team's effort, in addition to permitting the teacher to monitor each individual's performance.

So what should you do if you have upwards of 30 students in your class? Send half of them home? No! I suggest "Activity Stations."

Divide your class into equal teams (as nearly as possible) and assign each group to an Activity Station. By way of illustration,

Jerry Steinberg received his degree in linguistics and French after graduating from Teachers' College with a specialization in teaching French as a second language.

Currently residing in Vancouver, B.C., he has taught both English and French as second languages to children and adults in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.

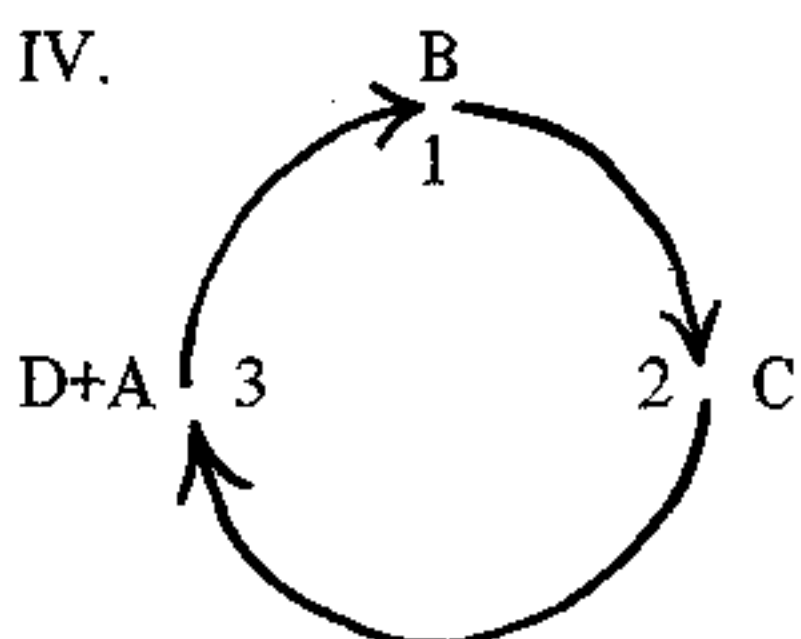
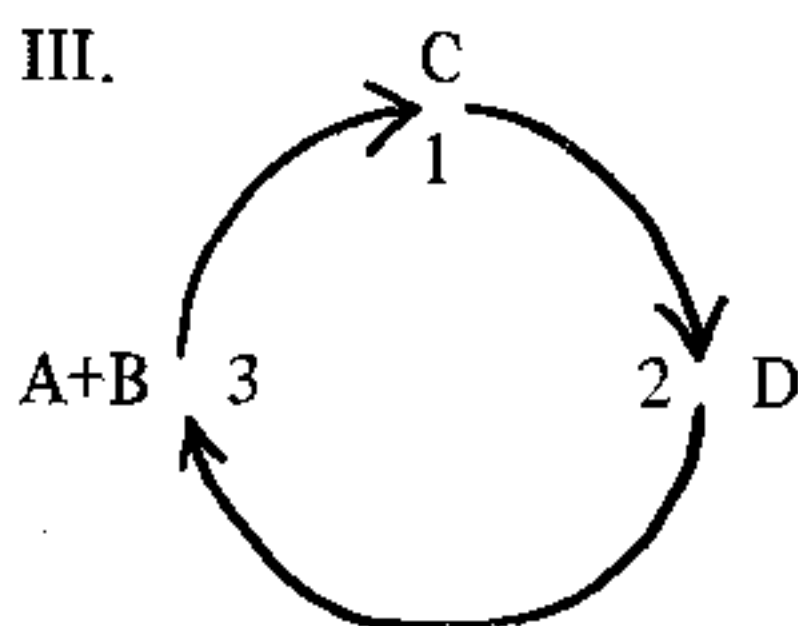
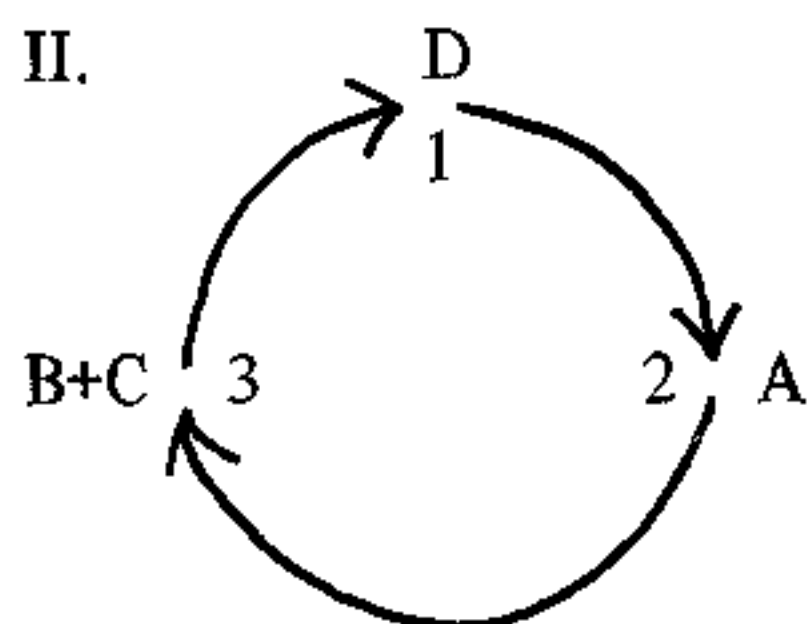
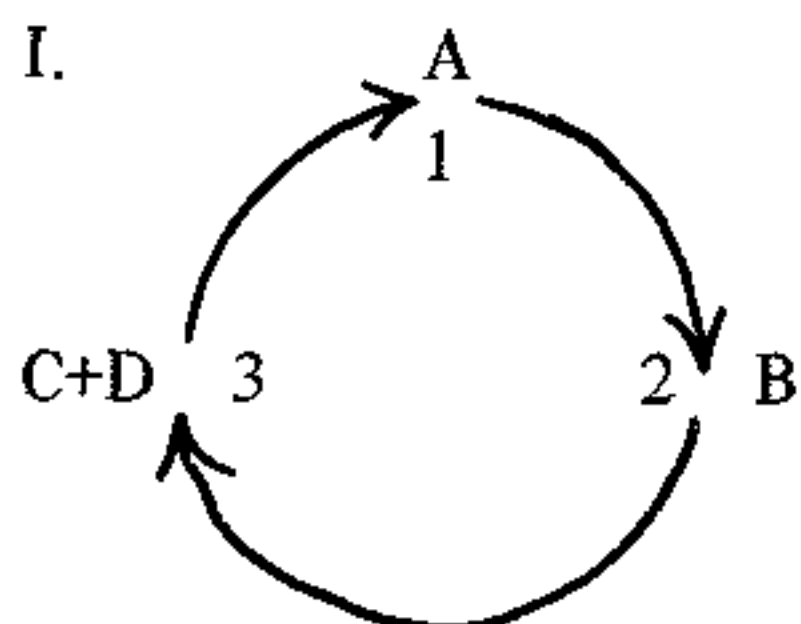
He is presently a free-lance educational consultant, engaged by school boards, universities, colleges and teacher-training institutions throughout Canada and the United States.

a class of 40 could have 4 teams of 10 students each. Team A could go to Station One, where they could, for example, listen to a taped story and answer written questions about the story. Team B, at Station Two, could do crossword puzzles. Team C would play T.V. DEFINITION (or another suitable game) against Team D under the direction of the teacher at Station Three.

After a given length of time (for example, 15 minutes), the groups would move on to the next station in a clockwise direction:

Team A would advance to Station Two, B to Three, and D to One, leaving Team C at Station Three to compete against Team B. This rotation could even take place the next day, depending on your schedule. This system takes a bit of organization, but once learned, it functions quite smoothly, and students move from one station to the next with a minimum of noise and confusion.

Here is how the rotation would work. Each diagram represents one session.



And here is a partial list of *alternative* activities which students at Stations One and Two could engage in while waiting to play at Station Three. (All are to be done in the target language, of course.)

- Reading comic books;
- Listening to a taped song and doing a cloze exercise;
- Watching a video-taped program and answering written questions;
- Creating a dialogue or skit on a given theme;
- Reading a story and answering written questions;
- Doing written exercises on grammar or vocabulary;
- Listening to a taped dialogue and answering questions;
- Creating a story on a given theme;
- Reading a newspaper article in preparation for discussion;
- Listening to a taped newscast and answering questions;
- Doing word searches or crossword puzzles;
- Reading a dialogue and answering questions;
- Playing quiet games which don't require the teacher's presence or supervision.

Some Sample Games

Here are three good games for making ESL students laugh and learn. All three are definition games, but they develop various language skills.

*Editor's note: These three sample games are from Jerry Steinberg's book of 110 games, entitled **Games Language People Play**. (Available from Dominie Press Limited, 345 Nugget Avenue, Unit 15, Agincourt, Ontario, M1S 4J4, Canada, for \$6.95 plus \$1.50 postage and handling)*

T.V. Definition (Reading)

LEVELS: all

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE: ten (for larger groups, see adaptation section below)

OBJECTIVE: For advanced classes, to introduce or review idiomatic expressions. For beginners and intermediate classes, to review vocabulary and spelling.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Blackboard or overhead projector, and several T.V. definitions.

DESCRIPTION: The group is divided into five teams of two players each. In turn, one player from each team will give away a letter of the alphabet he hopes *isn't* in the solution. If that letter indeed isn't in the solution, his partner will take a letter he hopes *is* in the solution. If it is, the correctly taken letter is written into its place(s) in the solution, and that team can guess at the solution. If a letter is given away and *is* in the solution, that team loses its turn, and the next team has a free guess at the solution, in addition to their regular turn to give away and take letters.

If the taken letter *isn't* in the solution, that team loses its chance to guess at the solution. For example:

Definition: *What students are when they fall asleep in class.*

Solution: _____

(Each dash represents a letter of the solution.)

The group is broken up into teams A,B, C,D and E. Player A1 is asked to give away a letter he hopes *isn't* in the solution. He gives away Z. There is no Z in the solution, so player A2 can now take a letter he hopes *is* in the solution. He takes E. There are two E's in the solution and they are written into their spaces:

_____ E _____ E _____

Team A, having given away and taken correctly, can now guess at the solution, but it's really too early in the game to have much of a chance of guessing correctly. So, Team A passes.

B1 gives away Q. There are no Q's in the solution, so player B2 takes O. There are

three O's in the solution, and they are now written into their spaces:

_____ O _____ E _____ O _____

Team B passes on their guess, since there still isn't enough information to help them make a correct guess.

Player C1 gives away B, but there *is* a B in the solution. The B is written into its space and Team C loses its chance to guess. Team D then gets a free guess.

B _____ O _____ E _____ O _____

They decide to pass, since they aren't really sure of the solution, and they take their regular turn at giving away and taking letters.

Player D1 gives away X correctly, and D2 takes M. As there are no M's in the solution, Team D loses its chance to guess.

Player E1 gives away J correctly, and E2 takes U correctly. All U's are written in (there's only one):

B _____ O _____ E _____ U _____ O _____

Team E takes a wild guess at the solution, but is wrong. Player A1 now gives away R by mistake. There *is* an R in the solution, and after it is written in, Team B has a free guess:

B _____ O _____ R _____ E _____ U _____ O _____

They guess BORED OF EDUCATION and win the match, since that is the solution to *What students are when they fall asleep in class.*

Here are some other T.V. definitions that I have used with my students:

- A Russian garden* a communist plot
- Refusing to sleep* resisting a rest
- Afraid to eat at Colonel Sanders'* chickening out

Alimony

..... the high cost of leaving

Drink for a small person

..... shrimp cocktail

What sleepy drivers do

..... they rest in pieces

SUGGESTIONS: I write the alphabet beneath the solution dashes and erase each letter as it is given away and taken. That way, it is given away and taken only once.

For beginners and intermediate groups, instead of using puns of idiomatic expressions, I simply challenge them with:

It's an animal: — — — — —

or

It's a language: — — — — —

To help students be more successful in the game, I suggest that they give away letters which are not frequently used, such as *X*, *Q*, *Z*, and *J*; and take vowels first, since every word must contain at least one vowel.

Students are encouraged to confer with their partners as to which letter to give away or take, and, of course, when they guess at the solution.

ADAPTATION: When an entire class is involved, teams could consist of five to seven players each, instead of two as outlined in the example.

NOTE: This game is an adaptation of the television game DEFINITION. Hence, the name T.V. Definition.

Dictionary
(Listening, Speaking)

LEVELS: all

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE: unlimited

OBJECTIVE: To develop critical listening skills and comprehension of definitions.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Provide a dictionary geared to the linguistic capabilities of your students; preferably one which, in

addition to defining words, shows the word in context. One that I have found quite suitable for most ESL classes is the *New Horizon Ladder Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: New American Library, 1970.) Almost any dictionary will do, and in a pinch, the teacher can make up definitions for each word.

DESCRIPTION: The teacher finds a suitable word in the dictionary, names the part of speech (noun, verb, etc.) and the first letter, and reads the definitions (and the sentences using the word in context, if necessary). The students try to guess the word being defined. The first student to correctly identify the word chooses the next word and reads the definitions. For example:

"My word is a verb and it begins with the letter *t*. It means: 1. produce thoughts; form in the mind. *I often _____ of home.* 2. reason; consider. *He is _____ about the problem.* 3. believe; have faith in something. *He _____ he can do it.*"

SUGGESTION: For classes that tend to get over-excited, I divide them into two teams, subtract two points for each wrong guess and add five for each correct guess. This encourages students to listen carefully and to think, instead of calling out every word they know that begins with the named letter.

Seven Definitions
(Listening, Speaking)

LEVELS: intermediate and advanced

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE: ten (for larger groups, see adaptations section below)

OBJECTIVE: To give practice in defining words. (This skill is essential in second-language communication, especially when *the* word for a concept isn't known by one of the communicants. For example: "What does *motley* mean?" or "what do you call a young dog?")

MATERIALS NEEDED: A pile of cue cards with seven items of vocabulary on each

(continued on page 60)

LAUGH AND LEARN

(continued from page 58)

(verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, adverbs, etc.). Example:

| | | |
|-------|---------|------------|
| lunch | laugh | funny |
| egg | candle | dictionary |
| happy | fork | under |
| far | between | shoe |
| fast | heavy | wash |
| cry | desk | typewriter |
| long | eat | slowly |

DESCRIPTION: Students are paired off and one partner is given the cue card. Within a time limit of sixty seconds (more or less, according to their abilities), the student must define each item on his card. His team gets one point for each item correctly defined by his partner. For example:

Student A1:

"It's the meal after breakfast."

"No, between breakfast and supper."

Student A2:

"Supper?"

"Lunch?"

"Yes."

"You eat this at breakfast."

"No, you eat it with bacon."

"Singular!"

"Yes."

"Cereal?"

"Eggs?"

"Egg."

SUGGESTIONS: I have my students sit back-to-back to avoid the use of gestures and increase language dependency.

ADAPTATIONS: For groups that have more than ten students, five equal teams could be formed. The members on each team take turns giving the definitions to the other members of the team.

| | |
|----|---------------|
| A2 | B2 |
| A3 | B3 |
| A4 | A1 B4 B1 etc. |
| A5 | B5 |
| A6 | B6 |

For less fluent students, the definitions could be written out before the game is played.

TESL Reporter

Box 1830

Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus

Laie, Hawaii 96762

Non-Profit Organization

U. S. Postage

PAID

LAIE, HAWAII

Permit Number One

address correction requested