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## Word Dominoes

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normally precede nouns but adverbs do not." Color coding also shows the relationship among words classes. I code nouns red, subject pronouns scarlet, and object pronouns pink to illustrate that just as scarlet and pink are shades of red, "he" and "him" may refer to the same noun, but their usage is determined by word order. Thus, scarlet precedes blue (the verb) but pink follows it to produce "He sees the cat," and "The cat sees him."

### Procedure

"Word Dominoes" is best played with three to six players. The teacher deals seven cards to each player. The remaining cards are placed face down next to the free pile which consists of articles, verb endings, and punctuation marks to be used as needed.

The player to the teacher's right puts down a card to begin a sentence; each player in turn puts down an appropriate card to continue the sentence. Whenever necessary, a player may use a card from the free pile in conjunction with the card being played. This builds awareness of the need for articles, plurals, and tense.

When the players agree that a sentence is complete, they finish it with the appropriate punctuation mark, then put the used colored cards at the far end of the table and return the free cards for reuse. The next player begins a new sentence. If a player does not have an appropriate card to play, he/she will draw up to three times from the unused cards which were placed face down after dealing. The winner is the first player to place all his/her cards in sentences or the player with the least number of cards after a specified time.

New words can be added to keep the game challenging. Modals, negations,

irregular past tenses, and conjunctions will also increase the level of difficulty.

**About the Author**

*Vivian Karr has taught K-12 ESL for the Littleton (Colorado) Public Schools since 1979. Prior to that, she taught English*

*in Italy on a Fulbright award. For the past two years she has also worked on two U.S. Department of Education grants for the development and implementation of foreign language curricula in elementary schools (FLES) using TPR and the Natural Approach.*

**FREE PILE  
(WHITE)**

*a  
an  
the  
-ed  
-s  
-es  
-ing  
.  
?  
!*

**VERBS  
(BLUE)**

*am  
is  
are  
was  
were  
have  
has  
do  
does  
want  
like  
see, etc.*

**QUESTION WORDS  
(YELLOW)**

*where  
what  
who  
when  
why*

**NOUNS  
(RED)**

*nouns familiar  
to students*

**SUBJECT PRONOUNS  
(SCARLET)**

*I  
you  
he  
she  
it  
we  
they*

**OBJECT PRONOUNS  
(PINK)**

*me  
you  
him  
her  
it  
us  
them*

**ADJECTIVES  
(ORANGE)**

*big  
small  
pretty, etc.*

**ADVERBS  
(GREEN)**

*slowly  
quickly  
fast, etc.*

**PREPOSITIONS  
(PURPLE)**

*to  
from  
with, etc.*

# Word Dominoes

Vivian Karr, Littleton Public Schools

Children learn vocabulary and pronunciation in a second language with relative ease, but they do not acquire syntax as readily. Children who have "picked up" English will write what they hear: "You like apples?" and "She going to the store." This is because auxiliary verbs are among the many forms reduced when speaking. Left uncorrected, these errors fossilize. Clearly then, elementary ESL students should be given opportunities to practice syntax without having to study formal grammar.

To make teaching and practicing syntax more meaningful and fun in my elementary ESL class, I have developed the game "Word Dominoes." It is easy to make and effectively teaches "why this word can't go there, and this word must go here."

## Producing the Cards

First, the teacher writes familiar words on flash cards. Pronouns, auxiliaries, and prepositions are also included for a total of at least fifty cards.

Teacher and students then categorize the cards: words that name people or things (nouns); words that do things (verbs); words that tell how things are done (adverbs).

Students then color the cards according to category. Color coding has two purposes: to make the game visually appealing and to facilitate sequencing. It makes more sense to a nine-year-old to hear that "blue cards can follow red cards but green cards cannot," than "adjectives

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