

Barrier games

Barrier games are a specific form of information gap activity. Information gap activities are communicative activities for two or more learners, where, for example: Learner A has information that Learner B needs, and vice versa. In a barrier game Learner A and Learner B sit with a barrier between them and are required to convey information to each other, for example while looking at different text or images.

Barrier games can encourage learners to develop speaking and listening skills within the context of a curriculum topic and are a great way of providing an opportunity for purposeful communication with learners who can provide good models of English. They support learners with the development of strategies for communication: rewording, requesting clarification, questioning, giving and following simple clear instructions (explaining), clarifying or describing.

Barrier games can be used as a way of reinforcing newly-acquired language, or to check the learner has understood the main points of a specific topic. They are motivating and provide a sense of achievement.

Types of barrier games

There are a number of variations, such as:

- ◆ Learner A is given a map, diagram, chart, timeline etc. with information on it and Learner B has a blank version
- ◆ Learner A and Learner B each have a partially completed version of a map, diagram, chart, timeline etc. with different information missing
- ◆ Learner A gives instructions to Learner B to enable them to draw or complete a picture or diagram, and vice versa
- ◆ Learners A and B are given identical sets of photographs, picture cards, real objects (toy cars or animals, shapes etc.) to arrange or sequence in an identical way
- ◆ Learner B places objects on a blank picture board or grid to match Learner A's board
- ◆ Pairs identify differences between two 'spot the difference' pictures

Practical ideas for using barrier games

- ✓ **Top tip:** Identify the language objectives of the task (e.g. practising positional language: under, above, next to)
- ? **To consider:** grouping or pairing EAL learners with peers who can provide good models of English

- ◆ Barrier games can be played by two learners, two pairs of learners, or an adult and a learner or pair of learners.
- ◆ A simple way of providing a barrier is to place a large book on its side between the partners. Another technique is for the learners to sit back to back.
- ◆ It is important to identify the language objectives of the barrier game, e.g. in a history lesson it might be to practise prepositions of time (before, after, later etc.) past simple tense or question forming.
- ◆ Provide a model of the language you would like the EAL learner to use. This can be done by modelling the language orally or providing some written models, e.g. sentence starters, questions to ask.

Good for EAL, Good for All: Can I use barrier games with the whole class?

Yes, they support everyone. They encourage collaborative learning, and help develop speaking and listening skills for all learners.