

8 ESL Spelling Games for Every Type of Learner

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S-P-E-L-L-I-N-G

C-A-N

B-E

F-U-N!

You read that right. When taught correctly, spelling can be fun for the whole class!

Even if writing isn't one of your main classroom objectives, it's still important for students to have a firm grasp on proper spelling.

Whether students find learning proper spelling easy or a nightmare, one thing's for sure: most students will tell you that spelling exercises are rather dull. That's why I recommend using some simple and easy games to get your students excited about spelling!

8 Exciting ESL Spelling Games That Make Learning Fun

Games engage your students' minds differently than regular lessons. They encourage learners to apply their knowledge in high-energy, often fast-paced situations. With ESL spelling games, students must utilize their spelling abilities to compete against themselves and others.

Moreover, games keep things interesting in the classroom for you and your students. They add a little excitement to what can easily turn into memorization drills and repetitive writing exercises. While these methods certainly have their place in the learning experience, games are a great way to spice things up!

Whether your goal is to review lesson-specific vocabulary words or help with general spelling, these games will get students learning *and* having fun.

1. Banana Grams

Banana Grams is an excellent game for students who need to practice or **improve their general spelling skills**. Similar to scrabble *without the board*, Banana Grams requires players to use letter tiles to create their own collage of connected words.

How to play: Prepare and print tiles from online and cut them out. You'll need to prepare several sets. If you're pressed for time, you can purchase your Banana Grams game set online instead.

In the classroom, divide the class into small groups or pairs. Provide each group with their tile set, then cover the rules of the game.

Basically, the game is played by having students race against each other to use all their tiles. Students use these tiles to create interconnecting words. And the group that finishes first and spells their words correctly is the winner.

If even one word is misspelled, correct the spelling and instruct the class to continue playing the game.

Be sure to circle around the classroom, checking your students' words as needed.

If you're teaching an unmotivated group of learners, you may want to spice things up by offering prizes for the winners.



2. Boggle

Boggle is a competitive game that can easily be adapted for different ESL levels. In this game, students must race against each other to find as many words as possible before the time runs out.

How to play: There are several ways you can play boggle in the classroom. You can either print out boggle sheets and assign letters that the students must write in the boxes, or you can draw a giant *Boggle box* on the whiteboard for the whole class to use. The *Boggle board* is a box or grid, usually with 4x4 squares, with each square containing a random letter.

To create words, you must work in a way where all the necessary letters are connected—each letter has to touch its previous one. You can have multiple occurrences of the same letter in a word as long as that letter appears multiple times in the grid and is touching the other letters accordingly. For example, if you have the letters “d-a-t-a” you can't use the same “a” box for both occurrences of “a” in “data,” you need to have two unique letters present.

When playing, students must work individually (or in teams) to find as many words on the game board as possible within two or three minutes—you decide how long based on their skill level. Words can be arranged horizontally, vertically, diagonally and backwards. You may even allow other various shapes and designs, just as long as the letters are touching and not used more than once in a word.

Scoring can be done a number of ways. The student or team of students who finds the most words could be considered the winner. Or, for advanced students, you can use your own type of point system. An example of this would be awarding students one point for every three-letter word, two points for four-letter words and so on.

I recommend having students read their list of words aloud for the class to hear. That way, they get to practice speaking while you benefit from being able to keep better track of score.

At the end of the last round, tally the points or number of words to decide the overall winner.

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3. Scrabble

Scrabble is a fun board game for getting students to test their general vocabulary knowledge. Scrabble also encourages students to learn new words as they scramble to find ways to combine all their letters to form words.

How to play: Scrabble is a fairly straightforward game. Simply divide your class into groups of four, then distribute the Scrabble game board and letter tiles to each group. Students compete against each other to create words on the board, and the first student to use all of their tiles wins the game.

Tip: This game is best suited for small classes, as you will need to provide a Scrabble game set for every four students in your classroom.

If you're working with younger students or a class with varying levels of proficiency, consider having students work in teams of four, where eight students play on one board. That way, lower-level students can receive help from more proficient learners.



4. Spelling Bee

While technically not a game, this competitive activity is still a **ton of fun** and is ideal for reviewing the vocabulary pre-taught or covered in your previous lessons.

How to play: Inform the students a few days in advance that you'll be having a spelling bee. Then, prepare a list of words, making each word slightly more challenging than the previous one.

Start by assigning each student a number, or have them go alphabetically based on their last names. Call the first word for the first student, giving them one or two minutes to try to spell the word. If they have trouble, you may provide them with the definition of the word or use it in a sentence.

If the student spells the word correctly, they should stay seated on top of their desk or at the front of the classroom to participate in the next round once all of the students have had a try. If the student spells the word incorrectly, they should sit down in their chair at their desk. Keep going until you're down to one student. The student left standing at the end is the winner and certainly deserves a prize!

5. Word Search

The word search is a low-key activity to practice spelling. This is best used for your beginner students.

How to play: [Prepare a word search worksheet](#) using vocabulary words you've covered in your classes. Working alone or in pairs, students will race to find all the words hidden in the worksheet. The first team to locate all the words wins.

Tip: For an added element of practice, have your students write a sentence using each word they locate in the word search.

6. Crossword Puzzle

Crossword puzzles are another fun way to let students practice building their vocabulary.

How to play: [Create your own crossword puzzle](#) based on relevant vocabulary, making sure to provide adequate hints to help students complete the puzzle. Using the clues provided, students work in pairs to determine which words fit in their corresponding boxes while spelling the words correctly. The first pair to solve the puzzle correctly wins the game.

7. Word Unscramble

This game is **pure fun**! Students race to unscramble letters, rearranging them into correctly-spelled vocabulary words.

How to play: Prepare a list of vocabulary words, then write the words on the worksheet with the letters scrambled. For example, if you're covering colors, you could rewrite "blue" as "elub."

To begin the exercise, put your students into pairs and give each pair a worksheet. The first pair to unscramble and correctly spell the vocabulary words wins.

8. Scattegories

Scattegories challenges students to think of words in a given category, making it the ideal game for reviewing and practicing specific groups of vocabulary words.

How to play: When planning this activity, brainstorm a series of categories, like *places*, *foods*, *animals*, *verbs* and *colors*. I recommend aiming for around 10 categories to make the activity fun and give students the opportunity to practice a broader range of vocabulary words.

Begin the activity by dividing students into groups of three or four, and then writing the categories on the board. Then choose a letter from the alphabet which teams must use to write their vocabulary words. For example, if you use the letter "D," students need to write words that start with that letter on the board. Examples include: *Denver*, *donuts*, *deer*, *dance* and *dark blue*. Be sure to give the class four or five minutes to write down their words.

Once the time is up, each team should read their words **and spell them** correctly. Every word is worth one point. If two or more teams have the same word, no points are awarded for that word. Once all the words are read and the points are tallied, start the next round with a new letter.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Spelling Is F-U-N

As you can see, there are a lot of engaging activities that help students practice spelling without going over the same, boring drills. And best of all, these games can be adapted and changed depending on the age and level of your students.

Happy Spelling!

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