

Lesson 1: Playing the game

- Lesson focus:** understanding the Top Trumps cards, categories and game-play
- Language focus:** useful expressions for playing the game; comparatives and superlatives
- Materials:** Cut-out packs of Business Top Trumps cards (optionally, get the students to do this at the start of the lesson). The ideal number of players is two to four per pack so you will need to prepare enough packs for your class to play with.

a trump noun [countable] /trʌmp/
the card that is worth most (has the highest value) in a game

to trump verb [transitive] /trʌmp/
to win or to succeed, for example in sports or business, because you have an advantage that your opponent does not have

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The cards

This Top Trumps set is made up of 30 original cards. Each card contains information about a different person. The information on each card provides you with:

- the person's first name
- their job title
- a photo
- a short text
- five categories and a number or amount (score) for each category



The short text is different on each card and contains information about that person's work life, personality, problems, private life, personal situation, background, hopes and wishes.

All of the fictional people depicted and described on the cards work for the same fictional company. They are employed either directly or indirectly by the company.

The unnamed company is a generic, medium-sized family enterprise. It is most likely a manufacturing company that makes, sells and distributes an unstated product.

A range of different departments and their employees is represented as are managerial positions, consultants, and outside or agency staff.

The five categories

The five categories are the same on each card. The numbers or amounts given for each category are different on each card and apply only to the person on that card.

The categories are important for playing the game.

Rank (in company): This category tells you how high up in the company each person is. The higher they are in the company, the higher the number. In this category the scoring ranges goes from 1-25 (1 being the lowest, 25 being the highest). So when playing the game, Ivy the canteen supervisor, whose ranking is 7, will trump (i.e. beat) Joy the cleaner, who ranks 1 in the company.

Earnings: This 'real' sum given in British pounds is the amount each person earns per year. The card featuring the person with the highest earnings wins. If the earnings on a card are 'undisclosed' you can assume that they are very high. So, although it is unlikely that they would trump Robert's earnings, Jonathan's earnings will trump everyone else's.

Promotion chances: This category takes many factors into consideration. These include age, ambition, and current position in the company. The winning card in this category is the one with the highest number, e.g. Marco's promotion chances are 7, which means he would beat Reg, whose chances are lower at 5. The scores in the category range from 5 to 15.

Years in company: This 'real' figure tells us how many years each person has worked for the company. When you play this category, the card with the highest number wins.

Lesson 1: Playing the game

Stress level: This subjective number tells us how high each person's perceived stress level is. The scores in this category start at 15 and go up to 70. The card with the highest number (i.e. the person with the highest stress level) wins this category.

Strategy tips

- In Top Trumps, the highest number always wins.
- Do not reveal the details of the category ranges to your students. As they play the game, they will gain more knowledge of the cards and will be able to play more strategically as they get to know the categories.

How to play (and win) the game

The minimum number of players is two, the maximum is six. The ideal number is three or four players.

Easy version

- Shuffle the cards and deal them all out, face down, to the players.
- Each player holds their cards face up in the palm of their hand. The players may only look at their top card.
- The game proceeds clockwise. The player to the left of the dealer starts by reading out a category from their top card, e.g. 'Years in the company: 25'.
- The other players then read out the same category from the card that is at the top of the pile in their hand.
- The player with the highest score or value wins all the cards in that round and places them at the bottom of their pile.
- The player who won that round starts the next round.
- If two cards have the same value, the round is drawn and there is no winner. Place all the cards in the middle. The winner of the following round wins these cards too.
- The game ends when one player has won all the cards.

Advanced version

Play the game as above but instead of just reading the category and score, put them into (grammatically correct) sentences.

e.g.

Jonathan ranks third in the company.

Philippe earns £32,000 (thirty-two thousand pounds) a year.

Nicole's chance of promotion is 12.

Lee has been working in the company for 14 years.

Jolene's stress level is quite high. It's 55.

Language practice

Playing the game provides a great opportunity to revise comparatives as they appear and are required. With lower-level students especially, remind them of the most common structures and their negative forms before you start the game:

(not) higher than = the comparative form of the adjective + *than*

(not) as much as = *as* + adverb + *as*

(not) much more than = adverb + the comparative form of the adjective + *than*

Periodically (or if you hear the structure being used incorrectly), pause the game and ask the students to compare the information on the top card in the pile they are each holding, e.g. *Ralf has worked in the company longer than Vince*, or *Joy doesn't earn as much as Dave*.

After making comparisons, the students could make superlative sentences from the information they have just discussed, e.g. *Reg has been with the company the longest*, or *Jason has the lowest stress level*.

Note: For the basic game, the texts provide interesting information only. For later lesson plans, they will become more important.

Useful expressions

Whose go / turn is it?

It's your go / turn.

Shuffle the cards.

Deal the cards.

I haven't got any cards left.

I've won!