

SENTENCE PUZZLE RACE

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Teacher's Notes

Level: absolute beginners (can be adapted to suit any levels)

Aim: revise vocabulary, word order and sentence structures (+,-,?)

Grouping: pair work/teams

Time: 20-40 mins

Materials: one set of word cards cut up for each team, list of sentences in students' L1

I devised this game when my starter group had a lot of difficulty understanding word order and plurals using 'to be'. The idea is very simple really and can be changed to suit any levels, grammar points and vocabulary.

Preparation:

1. Print word cards (below) and cut them out and put them into envelopes. Make one set per teams. (The colour code was added to make sentence structure more visual but not necessary)
2. Prepare a list of sentences in students L1. As the game proceeds you might find it useful to improvise new ones to focus on points that are more problematic for the students. (see possible sentences list). Start with simpler structures and the sentences can get more difficult towards the end.

Set up:

1. Divide class into teams. Put two students in each team.
2. Hand out one envelope with the cards per team and ask the students to have a look (if they haven't done it already...).
3. Ask them (if they haven't started it already) to put the cards into categories (the colour code suggests it anyway). It's a good idea to tell them that maybe the green cards need some further sorting (articles: a-an-the/jobs: waiter-etc./nouns: address-dog-etc./possessive pronouns: my-your-etc.). [These cards are all green to help students understand that they usually make one longer structure, e.g. my book, a waiter, etc.]
4. They might ask you what the 'smiley' and the turquoise 's' are. The smiley is a Jolly Joker that can mean any word not included. The 's' is to form plural nouns.
5. When everything is set demonstrate the game by saying a very simple sentence in students L1 (e.g. My name is John.).
6. Explain rules.

How to play the game:

1. Read a sentence from the list.
2. Let students recreate the sentence in English using the word-cards.
3. When all the teams are ready you might ask them how many cards they have and in what colour. In case of different answers give them a last chance to make changes if they want.
4. Give feedback (see below).
5. Give penalty points for any incorrect sentence.

Repeat procedure as long as you feel the atmosphere becomes tired you can introduce the second part of the game (or just skip the first and start with this), as this is where the fun begins:

1. The teams take turns in creating their own sentences using the word cards. The Jolly Joker is going to be used a lot here!
2. Carefully check that the English sentences and their L1 translations are indeed correct and sometimes help them create interesting structures if needed.
3. The sentence is read out loud in L1 to the other teams.
4. Teams recreate the sentence in English.
5. Give feedback (see below)
6. Award one point for each correct sentence so the penalty points start disappearing!

At the end of the game, the team with most points/least penalty points wins.

Giving feedback:

- You might just give them the correct English sentence by saying it, or write it on the board (with colour code if possible).
- For a more dramatic effect, though, you can keep a set of cards for yourself and while teams are working on their sentence, set up the correct one facing them and cover it (with a book for example). When teams are ready you can just remove the cover and reveal the correct sentence. Here they must have a clear view of the sample sentence, so have teams sit around it in a semi-circle.
- You can let teams with correct sentences answer all the whys to the teams with incorrect ones.

Tips:

- You can set up two teams (or just make two teams in the case of a small group) facing each other and place a separator/wall between their working areas. When they are ready and before you give feedback you can ask them to remove it and discuss any differences.
- I also used the same format teaching a beginner student one-2-one. Here I didn't prepare a list of sentences. I placed a separator between our working areas and gave feedback just by removing it and let the student discover why he made a mistake (if he did).
- You can make your own set of cards (using the grid included) to suit any grammatical structures, vocabulary at any level.
- Also it is possible to create mini dialogues, blanking out a line and ask students to make a correct sentence to fill the blank. Here you don't need to speak L1.

E.g. A: - Hello, _____?

B: - I'm fine, thanks. And you?

Examples of possible sentences (obviously only the English translations are here):

1. I'm a waiter/ I am a waiter.
2. How are you?
3. Where is my pen?
4. He isn't my brother/ He is not my brother.
5. What's your name?/ What is your name?
6. Our dogs are big.
7. Who is this?
8. She is my girlfriend. (Jolly Joker needed here for 'girlfriend')
9. That is her car/ That's her car.
10. Are you a waiter?
11. This book is good.
12. Are her cats old?
13. Our car is blue.
14. Where are their dogs?
15. His car isn't old/ His car is not old/ His car's not old.
16. This is not my phone number/ This isn't my phone number.

WORD CARDS

I	YOU	HE	SHE	WE	THEY	IT
THIS	THAT	AM	ARE	IS	'M	'RE
'S	CAR	NAME	JOB	ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER	WAITER
ENGINEER	SINGER	BOOK	DOG	BROTHER	MOTHER	PEN
RED	GOOD	BIG	SMALL	OLD	YOUNG	NICE
MY	YOUR	HIS	HER	OUR	THEIR	BLUE
A	AN	THE	WHAT	WHERE	HOW	WHO
NOT	😊	.	?	ISN'T	AREN'T	S

EMPTY GRID FOR YOUR OWN USE

