Taboo

Tags: advanced, beginner, intermediate, kids, vocabulary, warmer

The Taboo ESL game is a version of the popular guessing word game in which students have to describe words/phrases to their teammate(s), without using certain other words.

 enract or Prepared Words and Timer

Setup

If you have an Internet-connected computer or tablet, the easiest way to play is using our online Taboo game. This game offers a variety of suitable vocabulary categories, and each target word loads with pre-prepared ‘taboo’ words.

If not, you will need to prepare a set of appropriate words/phrases, along with the words that cannot be used in the description. For example if the target word were ‘pig’, those words might be ‘pork’, ‘pink’, ‘animal’ and ‘farm’. Two to four of these words works well, and you can adapt the game to the level of your students by changing them.

The taboo words should appear alongside the target word. You could do this as a slideshow to show on a computer, or on small pieces of paper. If you are teaching a large kids class a specific set of vocabulary (e.g. animals), you could get them to prepare the cards (possibly including a small picture) as a project beforehand.

In class, divide the students into two, three, or four teams of at least two players.

Game

1. The teams take turns playing.

2. One student from the team comes to the front of class. This student describes the word or phrase on the screen/paper, without using that word, the taboo words or any gestures. As the teacher, keep an eye on the taboo words — if they use one they have to skip to the next word.

3. The rest of the students in their team try to guess the word they are describing.
4. The teams have one minute to correctly guess as many words as possible, with each correct guess scoring one point. Depending on the level of your students, and how many words you have available, you may want to allow zero, one or infinite ‘passes’ per turn.

5. After each team has had one turn, start a new round by changing the students describing, and repeat.

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

The Taboo ESL game is normally played as above, with one student describing to their team. However, using our online game and a projector, you could also have the team describe for one student (“Reverse Taboo”).

**Target Language**

You can use the Taboo ESL game as a warmer or to review almost any type of vocabulary. By choosing suitable target/taboo words, this game can be played with all students from high beginner through to intermediate and advanced. With advanced students you could try expressions or idioms instead of single vocabulary words.

A very similar game to the Taboo ESL game is **Articulate**, in which students simply describe words or phrases with no taboo words.