

eslactive

Telephone

Tags: [beginner](#), [grammar](#), [intermediate](#), [kids](#), [vocabulary](#), [warmer](#)

In the Telephone ESL game (also known as Chinese Whispers), students pass words, phrases or sentences down a line by whispering them to the person in front.

 8+  10-20 mins  Board; Chalk/Markers

Setup

Depending on your target language, you may want to prepare a list of words or sentences beforehand. Often though, this is not necessary (as long as you're comfortable thinking on your feet).

In class, divide the students into two or more teams. It works best with at least four students per team, preferably more.

Students line up in their teams facing the board, with about an arms length's space between them (this is important so they don't overhear/cheat!), and the student at the front a few metres from the board.

The student at the front should have a pen/marker/chalk in order to write down what they hear. You could get them to write on the board, or if you don't trust them not to cheat by copying, on a piece of paper.

Game

1. Show the students at the back of the lines a word/sentence.
2. When you say go, the students pass that word/sentence down the line by whispering it to the person in front of them.
3. When it reaches the student at the front they have to write down what they hear.
4. The first team with the word/sentence written correctly gets a point.
5. At the end of each round, the person at the front goes to the back of the line.

6. Repeat the process with the next word/sentence.

7. The team with the most points at the end wins.

Tip: The Telephone ESL game will definitely tempt your students (especially kids) to cheat by skipping out people or shouting words forward. Be prepared with some swift points deductions if you spot that happening.

For lower level students playing with simple vocabulary words rather than phrases, you could ask them to grab the correct picture from a choice of flashcards lined up at the front, instead of writing the word.

With a large or higher level class, students can get bored once they have passed the message on. So why not try giving the students a whole conversation, with multiple sentences? Once the student at the back has passed on the first sentence, they come and collect the next one. The first team to have the full conversation written correctly wins a point.

Target Language

The Telephone ESL game is particularly popular with kids, but can work with the right adult class too. The great thing is that you can change the word/phrase/sentence you provide to align with almost anything your class has been learning. This could range from simple vocabulary words, to sentences using a specific grammar, to expressions or [idioms](#).

Make sure you adjust the difficulty of the target according to the level of your class too. Beginner classes will do best with basic vocabulary words, but challenge higher level students with phrases and sentences.

It's a really good idea to include words that the students have trouble pronouncing correctly in order to practise them. With slight variation of the game you can focus on practising the '-ed' pronunciation for past tense verbs specifically- see [ed Telephone](#) for details on that.

You could also theme sentences around a particular [holiday](#), use alliteration, or make up funny sentences for kids.

For an extension to this game which incorporates drawing as well, try [Pictionary Telephone](#). Want to do something similar to Telephone but haven't got enough students? Try a [Dictation Race](#).