

Student-centred games and activities

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Introduction

Are you interested in games in the classroom? Do you like video games but do not know how to make it happen? This article aims to use creative problem solving to help you come up with interactive games for your students that incorporate the skills and systems in your lesson plans. All this can be achieved with some creativity, gumption, and some PowerPoint tips and tricks. You will gain new skills from an old tool to reinvent your tech skills without learning how to code. When you are ready to play, start the game, and enter player one!

PowerPoint is much more than your elementary school presentation nightmare—it is all the fun of a game without all the frustration. Through PowerPoint, you can create unique and engaging games to help teach or enforce any skills and systems. While the pandemic has changed the way we teach, it does not have to ruin your students' engagement and ability to learn. With a little creativity and ingenuity, you can create your own PowerPoint games.

Opportunity for video games

I have always been a big kid; I come from the Gameboy generation, so video games have always been an interest of mine. As an ESL instructor, my goal is to teach while allowing students to have fun learning in the classroom. With the emergence of the novel Coronavirus, we have had to reinvent the classroom and the way we teach. Moving to an online space has become an opportunity to introduce video games in the classroom, and while many people are either married to traditional PowerPoint use or find it old and outdated, I am here to show you what PowerPoint can do. Undoubtedly, depending on the level of detail you add, this can be a time-consuming process, but once you have created a game, you will always have it for future classes, thereby reducing prep time for future classes.



Clarifying

First, choose your player—what kind of game do you want to create and how can it be played? Those are some big questions, and I rely on creative problem solving (clarify, ideate, develop, and implement) to help me. The first step of creative problem solving is to clarify; at this stage, I am trying to come up with a concept and ‘how might I create a game’ to teach a particular concept (Miller et al., 2001). When deciding what to create, I have to think about my lesson aims and objectives, the skills and systems I am teaching, and the theme or context.

Ideation

After clarifying, it is time to ideate, which relies on divergence and convergence. This technique can be a challenge, and I rely on divergence for this stage. I open up a [Google Jamboard](#) and start typing as many ideas as possible. Google Jamboard is a resource that provides a board and virtual ‘sticky notes’ where one can write ideas and place them on the board. A Jamboard is a great resource for brainstorming and mapping out ideas. I strive for quantity, not quality, and aim for innovative crazy and novel ideas. Although similar to brainstorming there is a difference. When brainstorming you have the topic in mind and your brain is automatically trained to think about ideas related only to that topic. Through this method you are clearing your mind and not judging your ideas; this offers more opportunity for creative and novel ideas to form. This method may sound like a strange concept, but if you clear your mind and write down whatever comes to mind, you will be surprised to see what happens even if it has nothing to do with anything. I start with a theme and aims. For example, a murder mystery pronunciation lesson. Once I have that in mind, I let the ideas flow and keep writing anything that comes to mind, like Clue, which makes me then think of red, Miss Scarlet, room, clue, fingerprints, computer, voice-activated, code name, secret, spy. This string of nonsensical words seems a bit intense, but I quite literally just wrote down whatever popped into my head, and I build on that. You can repeat this process to come up with any sort of game that encompasses any aspect of an ESL lesson. For example, to create a game for essay writing through the context of ‘risks’ I think of mountain climbing, which then makes me think of roller coasters and theme parks. With these ideas in mind, I might come up with a carnival or amusement park themed escape room, where in order to escape the funhouse students must correctly answer questions about essays or essay models. The goal of this stage is to develop as many ideas as possible before moving on to the convergence stage.

The convergence stage means taking all your ideas and reeling them in with judgement. Therefore, looking back on my previous words, I can take clue, fingerprints, voice-activated, code name, and spy. These are the words that have to do with the context of murder mystery and make me think of a clue-style murder mystery with some sort of coding system. Since my lesson is on pronunciation, I can use the phonemes as a code that



they must select in the right order to find clues and solve the mystery. For example, each question must be answered with a phoneme, and once they have all the correct answers, they become a code that allows the student to win the game. In the end, I came to an idea that I can turn into a game. Now that I have my concept, I need to take this theory and develop it into a functioning game.

You can cover essay writing, listening, speaking, grammar, reading, and functions. For example, a game that introduces an essay model where the student can click on each section of the essay to get an explanation or where the student must put a paragraph in the right order. There is also a great deal of flexibility when it comes to application in the classroom. You can use a game to introduce a grammar topic, or even spark discussions. You can have all the instructions in audio format to have students practice listening and pronunciation in a group. Students become engaged when they are learning through play and introducing a game that produces a high level of engagement provides the teacher with wonderful learning moments. Rich and spontaneous language arises when students are having fun together.

Develop

To bring my creations to life, I rely on a few PowerPoint tools to manipulate in different ways. To have the PowerPoint function the way I want it to, I depend mainly on hyperlinks and buttons. For example, if I have an image of a fingerprint that I want my students to click which will lead them to another slide, I do the following:

- Find an image to use (ex. on Google);
- Right-click the image and select 'insert' then 'Action' or 'Action Settings';
- Click 'Hyperlink to' and select 'Slide' (select slide that button leads to);
- Click on 'Illustrations' and then 'Icons' (select button options already available in PowerPoint)

Since the lesson I would like to teach is on pronunciation, I want to include a recording of the instructions to the game for my students to listen to. This can be done by clicking 'Insert', 'Media' and then 'Audio'.

I can then record myself giving instructions. The default sound icon can be boring and difficult to see, so I change it. I make sure I have an image or icon saved in my files to swap with the default icon to change the icon. I can then click on the sound icon (click 'Change Image' and then select the picture I would like to use). To add to the challenge and make sure your students are going through the game in the correct order, you can hide your slides, insuring that to play you must click the right buttons and move a certain way. To do this, you simply need to go to the sidebar on the left and click the slide you want to hide and click 'Hide Slide'. To undo this function, repeat the process and click 'Hide Slide' again.



Tips, tricks and implementation

After hours of crafting these games, I have come up with some tips and tricks to help you have a smoother time creating your own. First, I recommend that any images you do not want to have a function should be linked to the slide in which it belongs. As previously mentioned, PowerPoint slides are designed to move to the next slide when you click anywhere on the current slide during your presentation. To avoid this and make sure the students press the right button to move to the next part of the game, right-click the image or object that you do not want to move, click 'Action Settings', then go to 'Hyperlink', and select 'Slide'. You will want to choose the slide you are currently working on, and when you do, clicking on that image will not move your slide.

Another trick is copying and pasting already linked buttons or images. If you have a button that you have linked to a homepage and want to include it on more than one slide, by copying the already linked button, when you paste it onto another slide, it will bring that slide to the homepage as well. My next piece of advice is to take your time: It may take a while to complete, but it will be a unique game that you will reuse for future lessons. Be creative and play it yourself; taking the time to play it will allow you to make sure your game functions correctly. Once your game has been developed, it is ready to implement in your classes virtually or in person. Remember, anyone can be creative, and with practice, you can learn and create your games.

References

Miller, B., Vehar, J. R., & Firestien, R. L. (2001). *Creativity unbound: An introduction to creative process*. Innovation Resources, Inc.

Author Bio



Sara Alexandre is a multilevel ESL instructor at Sheridan College. She graduated from the TESOL Plus programme at Sheridan College in 2018 and has been teaching ever since. She has just completed her Master's in Applied Linguistics through distance learning at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, Ireland. Her future goal is to complete a PhD in Applied Linguistics after acquiring her DELTA. She is passionate about developing creative student-centred materials and sharing her knowledge with fellow instructors.