

Give or Take? Test Review in the ESL/EFL Classroom

by AARON DAVID MERMELSTEIN



“Give or Take?” is a fun game that teachers can use to review vocabulary in the English as a second language or foreign language (ESL/EFL) classroom. This game is easy to prepare, and it is a fun and efficient way to review for quizzes or larger midterm or final exams. It can be adapted to almost any grade level or ESL/EFL classroom as long as there are a sufficient number of vocabulary items to review. In my experience, adults love playing this game as much as children do. While this game is not intended for new English language

learners (ELLs), it may be used with low- to advanced-level ELLs as long as they have a basic understanding of the vocabulary being used. As with any game of competition, some caution is advised for using this game with young learners or learners with low maturity levels.

The game takes about five minutes to prepare and can last for about 30 to 40 minutes. You will need a whiteboard and pens, a chalkboard and chalk, or a piece of paper big enough to be seen by all the players in the game and pens to write

on it. You will also need one bell or noisemaker for each team, although when I have forgotten my noisemakers, I've substituted old dry-erase marker pens and instructed the students to tap them on the desks to make sounds. For environments with limited resources, recycled paper can be used, and students can raise their hands instead of making a sound.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE GAME

1. Prior to the class, you must have at least 25 to 30 vocabulary words to review, along with their English definitions. Also, you need to create an Answer Key Grid with at least 25 spaces and fill in the spaces with various points to be scored by the students. (See Table 1 for an example.) Each time you play the game, you should create a new Answer Key Grid so that students cannot memorize point locations on the grid. Don't allow students to look at your answer key, but you will need to look at it throughout the game in order to know how many points you should be writing in each grid space. (Note: Right before the game begins, I quickly flash the students the Answer Key Grid so that they know that all the points are predetermined and that I am not helping any teams. I am usually about two to three meters away from the students, so they can't really see any details, but this step is important so that the students trust the teacher and understand that they are in control of the game.)
2. At the beginning of the game, divide the class into two to four groups and instruct students to move their desks and sit together in a circle with their group members.

3. While the students are moving the desks into group circles, create a large Scoring Grid on the board with 25 spaces (see Table 2). Make sure everyone can see it, and write the numbers or names of each group on the left side of the grid where you can write their team scores later.
4. Explain the instructions for how to play the game (see below).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Prepare students to play the game. You might say something like this: "We are going to play a vocabulary review game called 'Give or Take?' I will say the English definitions of vocabulary words, and you will need to tell me the vocabulary word that best matches the definition. I will give each team a bell or noisemaker, and whoever knows the correct answer should make the sound. I will call on the first person who makes the sound, and that person will give the answer. You should not just shout out the answer if you have not been called on; if you do, you might be giving the answer to another team. Besides being the first person to make the sound, there are a few more rules that determine who gets to give the answer."

Then you can go over the following rules.

Rules

1. Only the person who has the bell or noisemaker and makes the sound can give an answer when called upon.
2. One student cannot make the sound and then ask other members of the group to tell him or her the answer.

	A	B	C	D	E	Extra Round	Bonus Round	Final Round	Secret Round
1	300+	100+	100+	200+	400+	500+	700+	900+	1,000+
2	100-	200+	100+	300+	400-	500+	700+	800-	1,000+
3	200-	200-	400-	200+	500+	500-	800+	800-	N/A
4	500-	100+	300+	500+	100+	600-	800-	N/A	N/A
5	300+	100-	600-	100-	600+	600-	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1. Sample Answer Key Grid, including extra rounds and scores

3. One student cannot make the sound and then pass the noisemaker to another student to answer.
4. If a student makes the sound but does not know the correct answer or does not give an answer at all, the teacher should read the definition again; then anyone on another team can make the sound and try to answer correctly.
5. There is no penalty for a wrong answer.
6. The teacher will not call on the same student to answer all the questions for a group, even if the student knows all the answers.

Note that you want the students to sit close together in their groups so that they can easily pass the noisemakers—not throw them—to others in their group who know the correct answers.

Scoring

Inform the students that the team with the most points at the end of the game wins. Explain that the student who answers correctly will select a space on the grid and have a chance to score points for his or her team. Here, you should give an example so that students understand how the game is played. For instance, you could select space B4 on the grid and then write in a value of 100 points. Next, explain that after you write in the number value, the person who answered correctly will have to choose whether to *give* the points to another team or *take* the points for his or her own team.

Naturally, the students will be curious as to why anyone would want to give points away to another team if the way to win the game is to have the most points. Here is where the game gets more fun and interesting. Write a plus sign and a minus sign next to the 100 points and explain that sometimes the point values are positive, and sometimes they are negative—but that you will write the plus or minus sign only *after* the students have made their selection of whether to give or take the points. So it is important to let students know that sometimes it is good to take the points, but sometimes it is good to give them away. Further, the person who answers correctly can give the points to any other team.

To make the game even more fun, after the student with the correct answer makes the grid space selection and then answers the question, “Give or take?” I ask the student, “Are you sure?” This often causes both concern and laughter. Usually, at some point in the game, many of the other students will join me when I ask this question.

Scoring for the game just involves filling in the points scored next to the team numbers on the left side of the Scoring Grid by either adding or subtracting.

At this point, you can give each team one noisemaker and begin the game.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

1. It may be necessary to provide the students with multiple English definitions and/or use gestures or body

	A	B	C	D	E
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

Table 2. Empty Scoring Grid

language to assist the students, especially with lower-level ELLs.

2. Keep an eye on the time and always be aware of how much time you have left to play the game. You don't want to end the game right in the middle of a question, and it is probably best to let the students know when there are only a few questions remaining in the game so that they can be more strategic in the decisions to give or take.
3. Always provide the correct answer for the students if they do not know it.

EXTENDED PLAY

One of the great benefits of this game is that there can be extended play, as long as there is enough time and an adequate number of vocabulary words to be reviewed. I extend the game to include previously learned vocabulary whenever possible. It is quite simple to extend the game: simply make additions to the original grid. I make each addition separately as a surprise, as this tends to add to the fun and perhaps adds a second or third chance for teams to win the game. I also increase the point values in the grid for extended play. Table 1 includes the extended play grid and some of the names for these extra rounds that I've used. Note that the scoring should always be done on the left side of the game grid so that you may add to the right side of the grid to extend play if time allows.

Another method of extending the play of the game is taking moments here and there to discuss the vocabulary words and definitions or provide real examples that connect these words to the students' lives. Basically, create extra learning opportunities wherever or whenever you can.

TEACHER PLAYER OPTION

One option for playing this game is to include yourself as an additional "team." The intent would be to motivate students to attempt to answer the questions or guess when they

are not sure of their answers. The way this option works is to allow the students plenty of time or several opportunities to answer the questions, but if they cannot answer correctly, you can chime in with the correct answer. Since you have previous knowledge of the scores on the grid, the students will select which section of the grid you get, and you must always "take" whatever score is revealed, whether it is positive or negative. It adds to the students' enjoyment of the game when the teacher is given a negative score.

EXTENSION

This game could be used for review of any other content, as long as there are enough questions for the spaces on the grid; I've used this game to review grammar as well. Also, the grid can be reduced to 16 or 20 spaces (i.e., 4 x 4 or 5 x 4 spaces on the grid), but I do not recommend reducing the number of spaces below 16, as the game would be over too quickly.

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