7 Memory games

It has been said that when working with young learners, introducing every learning activity as a game is a good way to increase motivation and make sure the learners participate with enthusiasm. With some adult classes the reverse may be true: that is, games may sometimes need to be presented as 'activities' for them to appreciate the potential for learning that they may contain.

This is an overgeneralization, of course, but what is true is that different learners, irrespective of their age, will respond differently to the idea of using games in the language classroom, and this needs to be considered when deciding on the way that any game is presented to a class.

From being a favourite pastime in Victorian drawing rooms to a way of easing the monotony of long car journeys in the era before Game Boy, the use of games that focus on memory has a long history. In the language class, they are a great way to provide repeated and intensive exposure to a particular area of language, as well as opportunities for retrieval. Another advantage of using memory games is that, though they may have a very explicit focus on language, the game is won or lost through the learners' ability to remember things, rather than on their ability to be accurate and correct in the language they are learning. This shift of emphasis is important in helping learners to avoid being embarrassed when they make mistakes. Some learners do have better memories than others, though, and in some of the activities there will be clear losers and winners. For this reason it is important to emphasize the light-hearted side of the game and to make sure that learners are competing in pairs or groups wherever possible so that any feelings of failure are kept to a minimum.

Name games

Teachers and learners are often faced with the mammoth task of learning by heart tens, sometimes hundreds, of names at the beginning of each term.

If everyone can quickly start using the names of the other participants in the class, however, it can be a step towards a more personalized and congenial learning environment. Here are six name games which can be used at the beginning of a group's life to facilitate this process.

- *Ball throwing*: A ball, or other soft object, is passed from one learner to another around the class. Learners say their own name in a loud and clear voice as they throw the ball to another person. Once everyone has had the ball at least once, the process is reversed, this time with learners having to remember the name of the person they are throwing the ball to. The class can be asked to do this as quickly as possible, or a second ball can also be introduced.
- Names with adjectives: Learner A says his or her name preceded by an adjective that begins with same sound (I'm strong Xiaoli, for example). Learner B does the same but also has to remember and repeat what Learner A said (This is strong Xiaoli and I'm quiet Kamrun). This process continues around the class with each new person who speaks having to repeat everything that was said before. If anyone has problems thinking of an adjective, the rest of the group help out. Adding gestures to go with the name and the adjective can also help to make things more memorable. Words other than adjectives can also be used (e.g. swimming Xiaoli or King Kamrun). See also the variation under Activity 7.3: Language chains on p.191.
- The history of my name: Learners work in pairs. They tell each other about any meanings that their names may have, whether they were named after anyone, how they feel about their names, and about any nicknames that they have ever had. At the end everyone tells the rest of the class what they have found out about their partners.
- Three times: Learner A stands up. The learner's task is to say the name of another learner in the class (Learner B) three times, before Learner B can say Learner A's name once. If Learner A fails to do this, then he or she has another go. When Learner A does this successfully, Learner B becomes the one who has to stand up.
- The blanket: The class is divided into two groups and a blanket is held up between them. Each group secretly chooses one person to go up to the blanket. On the count of three, the blanket is dropped and the two selected people have to quickly say the name of the person they are facing. Whoever says it last has to join the other team.

• Frankenstein: Everyone stands in a big circle. Learner A says the name of another learner on the opposite side of the circle (Learner B). Learner A then walks slowly towards Learner B with arms outstretched (like Frankenstein!). Learner B now has to say quickly the name of a person on the other side from him or her (Learner C) and walk towards Learner C, before Learner A gets to him or her. Learner A then takes Learner B's place in the circle. If anyone gets to the person they have named before the other person speaks, that person loses.

7.1 Kim's game

Memory focus	Retrieving the names of a list of objects.	
Level	Any	
Time	10 minutes plus	
Preparation	You will need a bag containing 8 to 15 objects. These could be food	
	items or other household objects, etc.	

Procedure

- Open the bag and take out the objects one at a time, eliciting the name of each item as you do so. Talking about the objects with the learners (*Do you like this? Where do you keep yours?*, etc.) will help to make the items more memorable. Place the objects on the table in front of you where everyone can see them.
- 2 Allow some time for the learners to look at the objects and try to remember them all.
- 3 Quickly put the objects back into the bag so that they can no longer be seen.
- 4 Ask the learners to write down the names of all of the objects that they can remember.
- 5 Ask them to compare lists with a partner and to add anything they had forgotten. Which pair remembered the most objects?
- 6 Ask individual students to tell you the names of objects from their lists, producing the item from the bag again as they do so.

Follow-up

Ask each learner to take one of the objects/pictures and hide it under the desks in front of him or her. Try to remember which learner has which object and then ask questions to find out. This is a natural context in which to introduce *Do you have the X?* at beginner level, or expressions of modality such as *I'm pretty sure you're the one with the Y* at higher levels.

Variations

- 1 Using pictures rather than the objects themselves and using a data projector, if available, increases the range of language areas that can be practised (and puts less strain on the teacher's bag straps!). Images can be found using a picture search engine like Google Images™ (http://images.google.com/) and chosen because they relate to a particular lexical set such as clothing, forms of transport, etc. With pictures, learners can be asked to remember details as well as just the name (e.g. *A man wearing blue overalls, riding a bike*).
- 2 With the objects/pictures still on the table, ask the learners to close their eyes while you remove one of them. Can they tell you which item is missing when they look again?

7.2 What's different?

-	Remembering detail and talking about changes (this activity is a natural way of practising this use of the present perfect tense).	
Level	Any	
Time	5–10 minutes	
Preparation	None	

Procedure

- 1 Organize the class into pairs or small groups. Ask everyone to study each other's clothing carefully.
- 2 Now ask half the people from each pair or group to go out of the room briefly.
- 3 Those inside and out now change three things about their clothing (put their watches on the other wrist, undo their shoelaces, etc.).
- 4 Those who were outside now come back in again and everyone tells each other the differences that they notice.

Variation

While half the class is outside, those inside make 10 changes to the classroom itself (e.g. open the curtains, move the tables, etc.). When the learners come back in, they report on the changes they notice.

7.3 Language chains

Memory focus	Storing a learner-generated list of language items in working	
	memory.	
Level	Elementary and above	
Time	5–10 minutes	
Preparation	None	

Procedure

Say this sentence to the class, using mime, gesture or translation to make meanings clear if necessary.

I went to the shop at the end of the road and I bought some apples.

2 Now choose somebody to continue the chain. This learner should repeat what you said and add something else.

I went to the shop at the end of the road and I bought some apples and a bicycle.

- 3 This learner now chooses another person to continue. Everything that has previously been said needs to be remembered and repeated each time, and something else needs to be added at the end. Language errors can be reformulated by the learners or the teacher as you go along.
- 4 When somebody makes a mistake by forgetting what somebody said, start a new chain. What is the longest chain of remembered language items that anyone can keep in their heads? You may wish to award a prize for the person who achieves this.

Follow-up

Ask the class to write down the longest sentence produced in the game.

Variations

- This activity can be focused around particular areas of vocabulary such as lexical sets (food, sports equipment, etc.) containers (*a box of ...*, *a packet of...*, etc.) or adjectives (learners use an adjective with each noun that they introduce).
- 2 Instead of focusing on vocabulary, this activity can also be used to practise an area of grammar. The first learner says a sentence using the target form.

I'm Hye Jun and I don't have a sister.

The next learner then repeats that sentence (changing the form if necessary) and adds another sentence about him- or herself, using the same form.

She's Hye Jun and she doesn't have a sister. I'm Severine and I don't smoke.

7.4 Remembering unusual sentences

Memory focus	Challenging learners to retrieve a large number of sentences using	
	a particular structure.	
Level	Elementary and above	
Time	15 minutes plus	
Preparation	None	

Procedure

Decide on an area of language that needs practising and ask everyone to write down some sentences that relate to themselves using the form you have chosen (the past simple is focused on below). The sentences do not have to be true. In fact, writing something unusual will probably make the activity more interesting, and the sentences more memorable. Go round and check the learners' work for accuracy. For the past simple some examples could be:

I went to an underwater wedding reception at the weekend.

I built my own house out of cardboard boxes.

2 After a few minutes, ask everyone to get into pairs. Each pair now looks at all of their sentences and decides which of their sentences is the most interesting. This is now chosen as the one thing that they both did.

- 3 Each pair now mingles with the rest of the class. Each time they meet another pair of students, they should interact with them, telling each other the thing that they did, and asking a few questions to find out more information where possible. They should try to remember what everyone says to them.
- 4 When energy starts to drop, bring everyone back to their seats. Ask each pair of students to go through what all of the pairs that they met did.
- 5 Ask them to share this in feedback. The pair that remembers the most could be awarded a prize.

Variation

With classes of fewer than 15 people, students may work individually.

7.5 Slap, clap, click, click

	Memory focus Storing a bank of previously used language items in working memory, and making those language items memorable through rhythmic chanting.	
Level	•	
	5 minutes plus	
Preparation	None	

Procedure

- If you have the space, sit with the learners in a closed circle. If not, this activity can still be done with learners standing in their usual positions. Teach the class the following 1, 2, 3, 4 rhythm.
 - Slap your thighs with both hands
 - 2 Clap
 - 3 Click the fingers on your left hand
 - 4 Click the fingers on your right hand
- 2 Decide in consultation with the learners on an area of vocabulary to review (for example, adjectives to describe people). Starting very slowly at first, show them how words can be chanted to fit in with the rhythm, by saying one word on the left click (e.g. *happy*) and a different word on the right (e.g. *friendly*). It is now the next person's turn to say a word.

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- If you are not working in a circle, you will need to agree on the order of the learners beforehand. The next person repeats the second word said by the person before (e.g. *friendly*) on the left click and then says a new word on the right click (e.g. *tired*).
- 3 Now do it with everyone doing the actions in time with each other. If someone makes a mistake by not keeping to the rhythm, or saying a word that has already been used or does not fit the category, you will have to start again. Try to beat the record for how many people can be involved in the chain before it breaks down.

Variations

- This activity can also be used to review collocations with key words (*get*, *take*, *make*, *do*, *have*, etc.). The first person says a headword on the left click (e.g. *get*) and a word that collocates with it on the right click (e.g. *home*) on the second. The second person then repeats this with the first sequence (*get* on the first click and *home* on the second) and then does a different chunk for the second sequence (for example *get* on the first click and *married* on the second. This process continues with the third person, and so on.
- 2 Each learner chooses a different vocabulary item in the category and tells everybody what it is. The first person says their own item on the left click and then somebody else's on the right. The person whose item was said then has to continue the process.
- 3 Learner 1 says a word on the left click (*cat*) and a letter of the alphabet on the right click (*m*). Learner 2 says a word beginning with *m* (*mountain*) on the left click and a new letter on the right click (*d*). Learner 3 says a word beginning with *d* on the left click (*donkey*), etc. This can be made harder by restricting it to a large lexical set like food and drink.

7.6 Pelmanism

Memory focus	mory focus Challenging learners to hold a range of language items in working	
	memory, and to recall the meanings of these items.	
Level	Any	
Time	10 minutes plus	
Preparation	Each group of up to six learners needs a set of 20-40 cards of	
	matching pairs. The matching pairs could consist of a word in	
	Li with a word in L2 (tomorrow/mañana), a word and a picture	
	of the word (a box of matches / picture of a box of matches –	
	see Box 7.6a), a word and its opposite meaning (closed/open – see	
	Box 7.6b), or words that together form a strong collocation or	
	fixed expression (see Box 7.6c).	
	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	

Procedure

- Each group of learners receives a set of the cards.
- 2 They spread them out on the table face down.
- 3 One learner in each group turns over two cards. If the two cards go together, he or she keeps them and takes another turn. If the cards do not go together, they are turned face down again and the turn passes to the next player.
- 4 As cards keep getting turned over, the learners start to remember where they are. The winner is the person with the most cards at the end.

Variation

As each card is turned over, learners have to say what is on the card that goes with it before trying to find that card. For instance, learners turn over a picture of a box of matches and have to say *a box of matches*. This happens whether they find matching pairs or not.

Follow-up

- The cards are put away and the learners work in pairs to produce a list of all the language items used in the game that they can remember.
- 2 The learners go through the language items and come up with other words that collocate with the words being focused on. For instance, in Box 7.6b *curly* or *straight* hair is acceptable, but not a *curly* road.
- 3 Learners test each other by saying one part of the pair and asking the other learners in their group to recall the language item that goes with it.



a box of matches	
a match	
a piece of cake	
a cake	
a bar of chocolate	
some chocolates	
a packet of crisps	
a handful of crisps	
	continu

a tin of tuna	
a tuna	
a loaf of bread	
a slice of bread	
a jar of honey	
a spoonful of honey	
a carton of milk	
a glass of milk	ij
	×
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Box 7.6b: Pelmanism

,	,
The shops are closed .	The window's open .
This class is really easy .	The questions are quite difficult .
He's got curly hair.	lt's a very straight road.
She's quite short .	lt's a very tall building.
The food's cheap .	Everything's expensive .
The train was early .	She's late for work.
She's got big eyes.	His feet are quite small .
A rich businessman.	A poor person.
She's quite thin .	lt's a thick book.
These grapes are sour .	This coffee's very sweet .
That's an interesting book.	The film was very boring .
The music's very loud .	She's very quiet .
><	

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Box 7.6c: Pelmanism

I'm going out tonight. Will you be able	to look after the children?	
Would you like to	have a look round?	
We need to look into what's	been going on.	
Why don't you look it up in the	dictionary?	
Look	out!	
She really looks up	to him.	
She's really looking forward to meeting	you.	
Things are beginning to look up a	bit.	
No thanks, I'm just	looking.	
It looks like it's going to	rain.	
*		

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7.7 Auditory Pelmanism

Memory focus
Training learners to hold and process language in working memory without visual clues.

Level Any
Time Preparation
Preparation
Preparation Preparation to 10 matching pairs which have been randomly written next to the numbers 1 to 20. See Box 7.7a for an example. A set of cards with the numbers from 1 to 20 are then stuck to a wall or whiteboard in the classroom.

Procedure

1 Organize the class into no more than four teams.

2 Each team chooses two of the numbers on the board. For each number read out the corresponding language item. For example:

Team A: Number ten. Teacher: Russia. Team A: Number 19.

Teacher: What's the fastest land animal?

If the two sentences go together, the corresponding numbers are taken down from the board and given to the team. They then have another go. If the two sentences do not go together, the turn passes to the next team.

3 As with standard Pelmanism (see Activity 7.6), the winners are the team that ends up with the most cards.

Follow-up

Learners work together to produce a written list of all of the language items that were used in the game that they can remember.

Variations

This activity can also be done in small groups. Each group spreads a set of the numbered cards out on the table. One learner has the sheet of paper with the matching pairs written on it (kept hidden from the rest of the group) and takes the role of the teacher in the procedure outlined above. The others spread out the set of 20 cards on the table. They play the game by taking it in turns to choose numbers and these are read out by the learner with the sheet.

For homework learners prepare a sheet like the one in Box 7.7a to focus on an area of language assigned by the teacher. These can then be

- used to play the game in small groups in the next class. Teams take it in turns to choose two numbers and the learner who prepared the sheet reads out the two corresponding sentences.
- 2 Instead of simply saying the utterances, other formats are also possible. For instance, one half of the numbers are the names of animals and the other half are the sounds that the animals make. Or one half describe situations and the other half are mimed versions of the situations. See Box 7.7b for a sheet using this principle which focuses on the language of aches and pains.



Box 7.7a: Auditory Pelmanism

- 1 Where is the highest waterfall in the world?
- 2 The cheetah.
- 3 The Vatican City.
- 4 What's the highest mountain in the world?
- 5 China.
- 6 What's the longest river in the world?
- 7 Which is the biggest country in the world?
- 8 Everest.
- 9 What's the largest bird in the world?
- 10 Russia.
- 11 Which city has the largest population?
- 12 In Venezuela.
- 13 The ostrich.
- 14 Which country has the largest population?
- 15 Tokyo.
- 16 What's the biggest animal in the world?
- 17 The blue whale.
- 18 What's the smallest country in the world?
- 19 What's the fastest land animal?
- 20 The Nile.

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Box 7.7b: Auditory Pelmanism

- 1 Say: I've got a thorn in my finger.
- 2 Say: My legs are a bit stiff.
- 3 Mime: My hands are freezing.
- 4 Say: I've got a splitting headache.
- 5 Mime: I've got a nosebleed.
- 6 Mime: I've got a thorn in my finger.
- 7 Mime: My back's killing me.
- 8 Say: I've got a dodgy stomach.
- 9 Mime: My legs are a bit stiff.
- 10 Say: I've got really bad toothache.
- 11 Say: I've got a pain in my neck.
- 12 Mime: I've got a splitting headache.
- 13 Mime: I've got a dodgy stomach.
- 14 Say: My head itches like mad.
- 15 Say: I've got a nosebleed.
- 16 Say: My back's killing me.
- 17 Say: My hands are freezing.
- 18 Mime: My head itches like mad.
- 19 Mime: I've got really bad toothache.
- 20 Mime: I've got a pain in my neck.

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7.8 First-letter hints

	Holding a range of idiomatic expressions in working memory and challenging retrieval of them.	
	8 8	
Level	Upper intermediate and above	
Time	10 minutes plus	
Preparation	Each group of learners needs a set of cards (see Box 7.8a) and an	
	answer sheet (see Box 7.8b).	

Procedure

- Divide the class up into small groups of at least three and give each group a set of cards. They spread them out face down on the table.
- 2 One learner in each group is given the answer sheet with the complete expressions and their meanings. This person acts as a judge and does not take part in the game.
- The other learners take it in turns to turn over a card. If they think they can complete the set expression, they check with the judge and, if correct, they keep the piece of paper. The judge then makes sure that everyone understands the expression. If a learner cannot complete the expression correctly, he or she places it face down again where it was. Play then passes to the next player (whether they completed the expression or not).
- 4 As more and more cards are turned over, learners start to remember how to complete the expressions. The winner is the person with the most cards at the end.

Follow-up

Learners go through all the cards again, personalizing the expressions by using them to talk about themselves or people they know. Ask learners to prepare their own cards for homework using a site like http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/

Note

The idea for this activity comes from *Teaching Chunks of Language: From Noticing to Remembering* by Seth Lindstomberg and Frank Boers, London: Heibling Languages, 2008.



Box 7.8a: First-letter hints

That must've cost a pretty p	That must've cost a p penny.
I need to p up the courage to tell her.	I need to pluck up the c to tell her.
To add i to injury she took all my stuff as well.	To add insult to i she took all my stuff as well.
She's a woman after my own h	She's a woman a my own heart.
It's just a s throw from where I live.	It's just a stone's t from where I live.
He's the s image of his dad.	He's the spitting i of his dad.
In the I run I think things will be OK.	In the long r I think things will be OK.
I've got a b to pick with you.	I've got a bone to p with you.
You're your own worst e	You're your own w enemy.
His h is in the right place.	His heart is in the right p

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Box 7.8b: First-letter hints

That must've cost a pretty penny. (That must've cost a lot of money.)

You're your own worst enemy. (You are the cause of your own problems.)

I need to pluck up the courage to tell her. (I need to make myself feel brave so that I can tell her.)

To add insult to injury she took all my stuff as well. (As well as all the other bad things she did, she took all my stuff.)

It's just a stone's throw from where I live. (It's very close to where I live.)

He's the spitting image of his dad. (He looks just like his dad.)

I've got a bone to pick with you. (I'm annoyed with you and I need to talk to you about it.)

In the long run I think things will be OK. (Eventually I think things will be OK.)

She's a woman after my own heart. (She likes the same things or behaves in the same way as I do.)

His heart is in the right place. (He's really a kind person who is doing his best to do the right thing.)

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7.9 The collocation game

N/	D 11 .:
•	Recognizing common collocations.
	Elementary and above
Time	10 minutes plus
Preparation	Each group of four or five learners will need a set of headwords
	and collocate cards. The example in Box 7.9 is for an elementary/
	pre-intermediate group. The headwords and collocate cards work
	best printed onto thick paper or card so that learners cannot see
	through them.

Procedure

- Divide the learners into groups of four or five. Give each group a set of the cards, and ask them to work together and match each headword with its seven collocates.
- 2 Go through the answers together, checking that everyone has got them right.
- The collocate cards are now turned face down, mixed up and spread randomly on the table. Each person takes one of the headwords. (There will be one left over if there are only four people in the group.) They now take turns to turn over a collocate card. If it fits with their headword, they keep it and have another go. If it does not fit, they replace it face down again, and it is the next person's go. The person who finds all of his or her collocates first is the winner.

Follow-up

- If groups finish quickly the learners can swap headwords and play the game again.
- 2 They test each other on the collocates which go with each person's headword.
- 3 They write personalized sentences using some of the collocations.



Box 7.9: The collocation game

HAVE	a shower	a party	an argument		
a good time	a problem	an accident	a headache		
GO	fishing	swimming	out		
for a walk	to a party	on holiday	home		
PLAY	chess	cards	the guitar		
computer games	an instrument	tennis	football		
DO	some cooking	your homework	karate		
some cleaning	the dishes	some exercise	business		
MAKE	friends with someone	a decision	an appointment		
your bed	a lot of noise	a mess	a mistake		
*					

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7.10 The suffix game

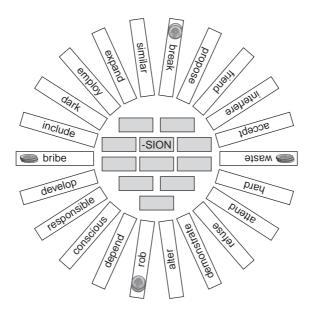
Memory focus	Making a list of common abstract nouns memorable through challenging repeated retrieval.
Level	Upper intermediate and above
Time	10 minutes plus
Preparation	Each group of two to four learners will need a complete set of
	the word cards in Box 7.10 (cut up into individual slips) and a
	maximum of eight coins or counters.

Procedure

Establish with the class how abstract nouns are often formed by adding a suffix to the end of other word forms. Give a few examples on the board if necessary. For example:

```
confident + -ence = confidence
frequent + -cy = frequency
treat + -ment = treatment
```

- 2 Organize the class into groups of two to four. Give each group a set of the word and suffix cards in Box 7.10.
- 3 Ask them to work as a group to match each suffix (the words in capitals) to two other words to form abstract nouns.
- 4 Deal with any difficulties as you go round the groups, or with the whole class together at the end.
 - Answers: breakage, wastage, proposal, refusal, robbery, bribery, development, employment, expansion, inclusion, acceptance, attendance, demonstration, alteration, dependence, interference, responsibility, similarity, friendship, hardship, consciousness, darkness
- 5 Now ask each group to put the 22 word cards face up in a circle formation on the table in front of them (see the picture of the game set-up on p. 209). They should be placed in a random order. The suffix cards are now mixed up and placed face down (randomly again) inside the circle. (The picture shows one suffix card turned over to illustrate Procedure 6b on p. 209.) Each player places two coins or counters, one on top of the other, on one of the 22 word cards, and as far away as possible from the other players' coins.



- 6 This game is far easier to demonstrate than to explain. If possible ask everyone to gather round one group's table in order to do this. The rules of the game are as follows:
 - a) Players take it in turns to try to move round the circle in a clockwise direction. They do this by finding the suffix card which goes with the word card which is next in the sequence.
 - b) If they turn over one of the suffix cards in the middle and it goes with the next card in the sequence, they move their two coins forward and have another turn. If not, they remain where they are and play passes to the next person. In the beginning it is only by luck that someone will be able to move forward, but gradually, as more and more cards get turned over, people start to remember where the cards that they need are located.
 - c) When a player lands on a card immediately behind another player's coins they have the chance to steal the top coin from that player. They can do this by finding the suffix card which goes with the word card immediately after the other player's coins. If they manage to do this, they jump over that player and steal any top coins that he or she may have.
 - d) The object of the game is to steal the top coins of all the other players. The person who does this is the winner.



Box 7.10: The suffix game

-AGE	break	waste			
-AL	propose	refuse			
-ERY	rob	bribe			
-MENT	develop	employ			
-SION	expand	include			
-ANCE	accept	attend			
-TION	demonstrate	alter			
-ENCE	depend	interfere			
-ITY	responsible	similar			
-SHIP	friend	hard			
-NESS	conscious	dark			
*					

Note

Depending on class size, it may be more appropriate for players to play in pairs within their groups. This way there can be more than four people in each group.

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