

## INFORMATION GAPS: VISUAL PROMPTS AND ORAL CLUES

---

This week's information gap activity, "20 Questions with Picture Cards," asks pairs to use visual prompts as the basis for orally exchanging information. Some other examples of this type of information gap activity include:

- **Navigation activities:** students ask for and give directions to different locations on a map
- **"Spot the difference" tasks:** students ask each other questions to try and identify a certain number of differences between two similar images
- **"Partial image" activities:** students have similar images that are missing certain details, which they must discuss to create a complete set of information (images of partial shopping receipts with some items, prices, and store names missing; incomplete movie advertisement posters, etc.)

As with most information gaps, students can't show each other their visual prompts during these activities, which requires them to speak to each other to achieve the activity's goal. Teachers can design the visual prompts to review recently covered vocabulary, thematic content, or curriculum-based material. After reviewing this example activity, be sure to consider how you might use visual prompts to create information gap activities related to your curriculum content.

---

### LEVEL

Upper beginner and above

---

### LANGUAGE FOCUS

Speaking and Grammar: asking yes/no questions

Vocabulary: varies depending on picture card content

---

### GOALS

During this activity, students will:

- Orally ask about and share clues about the target image using yes/no questions
- Review and practice vocabulary and/or content knowledge related to the picture card set

---

### MATERIALS

- Teacher:
  - Whiteboard, chalkboard, or large pieces of paper posted on the wall
  - Markers or chalk
  - A timing device (clock, watch, or timer)
- Students:
  - Pencils or pens and paper
  - Sets of picture card prompts, such the "[Picture This!](#)" cards from [Activate: Games for Learning American English](#)

## PREPARATION

---

- Copy, print out, or create sets of picture card prompts. Each student pair should have a set of at least 10 images.
- The picture card content will determine the activity's level of difficulty in terms of the required vocabulary and content knowledge:
  - Picture cards can relate to groups of recently learned vocabulary items (nouns). Teachers can create cards with basic line drawings, download images from the internet, or use pictures from print resources. This activity uses pre-made "[Picture This!](#)" cards.
  - Teachers can also use internet images or pictures in print resources to create card sets around themes from the non-language curriculum, for example:
    - **History:** images of famous people or events
    - **Science:** images of endangered animals, images related to environmental problems (an oil spill, the greenhouse effect, flooding), images related to a process (stages of a butterfly's lifecycle development)
    - **Literature:** images of characters or scenes from a story, book, play, or poem
    - **Art or Art History:** images of famous paintings or photographs

## PROCEDURES

---

1. Explain that students are going to work in pairs to play the game "20 Questions" using picture cards. In each pair of students, Player 1 will silently select a "secret image" from a card containing six images. Player 2 will ask up to 20 yes/no questions to figure out what the secret item is. If Player 2 guesses correctly, he or she gets a point. If Player 2 can't guess the item within 20 questions, Player 1 gets a point. (Note: for lower levels or to speed up game play, you can modify the game to be "10 questions").
2. Review yes/no question format, if needed, by giving/eliciting example questions, such as:
  - **Does the secret item....?** Example: *Does the secret item have four legs?*
  - **Is the secret item bigger/smaller [or other comparative adjective] than....?** Example: *Is the secret item bigger than a city bus?*
  - **Can the secret item....?** Example: *Can the secret item fly?*
  - **Is the secret item....?** Example: *Is the secret item a duck?*
3. Demonstrate game play with a student volunteer. Take on the role of Player 1:
  - Player 1 chooses a card and doesn't show it to Player 2. Player 1 silently chooses one of the images on the card (from the side with pictures) and then reads the card's title, which describes a thematic topic, out loud.
  - Player 2 asks yes/no questions to guess the item Player 1 chose. Player 1 answers "yes" or "no" and keeps track of the number of questions Player 1 asks.
  - Each time Player 1 answers, Player 2 can guess what the item is or ask another question. Guesses count as one of Player 2's allotted number of yes/no questions. If the guess is correct, Player 2 gets a point, and the players switch roles with Player 2 drawing a new card and Player 1 asking questions.

**Example**

Player 1: The topic is “Time for School” [*has silently picked “chalkboard”*]

Player 2: Can you write on the secret item?

Player 1: Yes. [*Player 1 counts the question*]

Player 2: Is the secret item white?

Player 1: No. [*Player 1 counts the question*]

Player 2: Is the secret item bigger than a desk?

Player 1: Yes. [*Player 1 counts the question*]

Player 2: Do teachers use the secret item?

Player 1: Yes. [*Player 1 counts the question*]

Player 2: Is the secret item a chalkboard?

Player 1: Yes. [*Player 2 gets a point – only 4 questions asked*]

4. Once everyone understands the rules, put students in pairs. Give each pair 5–10 Picture This! cards. Ask students to put the cards in a pile with the pictures facing down. Have pairs count off “1, 2, 1, 2...” or let pairs decide which player will be Player 1.
5. Tell pairs that cards may be used more than once if time allows, but a new picture should be chosen each time a card is reused.
6. Set a time limit for game play (~7-15 minutes); share the time limit with the class. Tell the students that the player in each pair with the most points when time is up wins.
7. Direct students to begin playing. Remind students that all questions must be in yes/no format. Monitor their progress, watch the time, and provide assistance, as needed.
8. If desired, when game play is finished, briefly recognize the winners in each pair with a round of applause. Ask students to share any vocabulary items or card content that they found challenging. Be sure to record these items to recycle in subsequent activities or lessons.

---

**VARIATION**

For a group-based variation of this information gap activity, see [Questions, Questions](#) from [Activate: Games for Learning American English](#)

---

**INFORMATION GAP TIP OF THE WEEK –  
MANAGING UNEVEN NUMBERS OF STUDENTS**


---

What can you do if you have designed an information gap activity for pairs, but you have an odd number of students? As the teacher, it can be tempting to offer to pair off with the remaining student, but this approach would prevent you from monitoring and supporting the rest of the class during the activity. Depending on how information is exchanged in the activity, the easiest way to manage the situation is to create one group of three and slightly modify how information is viewed and communicated. You will have two students in this group work cooperatively to share one set of information.

For example, for a group of three students in “20 Questions with Picture Cards,” have Students A and B share the role of Player 1 while Student C asks questions as Player 2. Students A and B can silently select the secret item together (pointing at items on the card and using non-verbal cues like nodding in agreement or giving a thumbs up to decide on the secret item) and take turns speaking: Student A announces the topic, Student B answers the first question, Student A answers the second question, and so on. If Student C can’t guess the secret item within in the 20-question limit, both Students A and B get one point. When it is time to switch roles, Players B and C take on the role of Player 1 while Student A guesses as Player 2. At the next switch, Players C and A act as Player 1 and Student B acts as Player 2.

Provide extra support to the group of three to make sure they understand how to share information and swap roles. If you regularly have an odd number of students, be sure that the same people are not always put in the special group of three students.