

## Board Games in the Business Classroom: How to Play “Business Decisions”

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Games have long been a staple of active learning environments. They are a fantastic way to reduce anxiety, promote competition, and energize classrooms. Moreover, games often provide opportunities for students to use their language skills in relatively less-structured environments. One type of game that has proven infinitely adaptable (and a great deal of fun) is the board game. Instructors can design their own board games to have students practice various skills and to provide students with a range of challenges.

I have used board games to help learners memorize and use vocabulary, practice key grammar points, review a range of content covered over many units, break the ice with one another, and role-play situations with real-world importance.

Board games can be especially useful in building real-world skills in a fun and non-threatening environment. For this reason, I have used board games extensively for Business English classes and lessons. To illustrate the usefulness of board games, I will describe a game I call “Business Decisions.”

### PREPARATION, PART 1: GATHERING MATERIALS AND CREATING COMPANIES

In order to play the game, the instructor will need the following items:

- A blank game board downloaded from the American English website: [americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource\\_files/board\\_game\\_template\\_0.pdf](http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/board_game_template_0.pdf)
- A die or dice
- Game pieces for students (or materials to make game pieces)
- Blank cards to make game cards
- Play money (optional)

The students should play an active role in preparing the game materials. As a first step, each student or group of students should

“create” a company. The instructor tells students to give the company a name, then provide a description of what the company does, how many employees it has, and other details. If students are having trouble thinking of their own companies, the instructor may help by eliciting details.

Here are some prompts an instructor could use to help students think about their company:

- What is your company’s name?
- What product or service does the company provide?
- How many people does your company employ? What are their roles?
- (Intermediate/Advanced) How is your product or service different from your competitors’?
- (Intermediate/Advanced) What is your company’s guiding philosophy?
- (Optional) Does your company have a slogan? If so, what is it?

### PREPARATION, PART 2: MAKING GAME CARDS

Students should also contribute to the preparation by creating game cards. The instructor informs students that there are two types of game cards: “business decision” and “chance.”

For business decision cards, the instructor explains that the students must imagine decisions they will have to make in the business world. The instructor also tells the class that these decisions should be written in a way that they could be relevant to any business. The instructor then models how to write these cards by providing examples. The following are examples of business decisions prepared for different student levels:

- Beginner: Name three things (equipment or supplies) your business needs.

- Beginner: How much will you pay your workers?
- Intermediate: What do you think is most important for your company: good customer service, inexpensive prices, or convenience? Why?
- Intermediate: Name three ways you will advertise your product or service.
- Advanced: Your company has recently lost a major client and needs to cut costs by 10 percent. Present your idea for cost-cutting measures to other students as if they were your Board of Directors.
- Advanced: Your company wants to expand but needs additional financing. Create a one-minute explanation you would present to prospective investors to convince them to finance your company.
- Advanced: The consumption tax is raised by 2 percent. Customers decide to spend less money. (Each player loses 100 dollars/ Each player moves back 1 space)

For chance cards, students must imagine situations that will affect their business. The instructor models how to write these cards by providing examples. The following are examples for different levels:

- Beginner: A new store opens next door. You lose several customers. (Lose 100 dollars/Go back 2 spaces)
- Beginner: One of your employees quits. (Lose 50 dollars/Go back 1 space)
- Intermediate: A product or service you offer is endorsed by a celebrity in a popular magazine. (Gain 100 dollars/Move ahead 3 spaces)
- Intermediate: Local construction makes it difficult for you to do business. (Lose 100 dollars/Go back 2 spaces)
- Advanced: Your overseas subsidiary does much better than expected in its first year. (Each player pays you 50 dollars/Move ahead 4 spaces)

Notice that each card has a dollar amount and a space amount. Providing penalties and benefits for each card in both money and spaces gives you the option to play the game either with play money or with spaces on the game board. I recommend using this system so that the cards can be reused for future games and to allow more flexibility in how students play the game.

The instructor should ask each student or group to make four or five game cards. The instructor may also use game cards from previous classes or cards he or she has created.

After the game cards are made, the instructor has the students label the spaces on the game board either “business decision” or “chance.” The students may also add other designs to make the board visually appealing. As the students are designing the board, the instructor may use this time to review and possibly revise the game cards created by the students.

### PREPARATION, PART 3: EXPLAINING THE RULES

The game may be played two ways, with or without play money. If the game is played without play money, the steps that include money can be omitted.

The instructor explains the following:

1. The instructor or a student serves as the “banker” and “Director of the Board.” This person is responsible for judging the quality of the responses and rewarding money or spaces for good answers to business decision cards.
2. For business decision cards, the Director of the Board may make the following awards:

- a. Lose 50 dollars or lose a turn—for answers that need improvement
  - b. Gain 50 dollars or move ahead 1 space—for good answers
  - c. Gain 100 dollars or move ahead 2 spaces—for excellent answers
3. Each player starts off with 400 dollars.
  4. Each player takes a turn rolling the dice and landing on spaces.
  5. If a player gets to the end of the board, he or she gets 100 dollars and continues from the beginning.
  6. Any player who goes “bankrupt,” losing all of his or her money, joins the Board of Directors and helps with judging answers and banking. (Note: If the instructor wishes, he or she may have the student continue playing, losing and gaining spaces and turns instead of money.)

### PLAYING THE GAME: SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The instructor should start the game by having the students or groups describe their company. As the Director of the Board, the instructor should express interest in each of the companies but also heighten the drama of the game by letting students know that it’s not easy to succeed in the business world.

The instructor should offer feedback and revisions from time to time but should not overcorrect students. Whenever possible, the instructor should remain “in role” as the Director of the Board and should also encourage students to remain “in role” as businesspeople. The instructor should take notes about how the students perform during the game and save the most intensive feedback for after the game.

The instructor should also elicit feedback from the students after the game to understand which parts were most useful and fun and to understand how to improve the game for future use.

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR BOARD GAME

As the example of Business Decisions demonstrates, board games can add fun and variety to your classroom. However, just as important as *whether* you use a board game is *how* you use it. As you use Business Decisions, you will want students to assume more and more ownership over the rules and content of the game. You will want to create challenges that are progressively more difficult and simulate what students will face outside the classroom. You will also want to create moments during the game for genuine camaraderie between classmates.

Games in all shapes and sizes are a great way to create a more active, lively class environment. For this reason, I highly encourage you to add board games to your repertoire of activities when teaching specialized subjects like Business English.

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