

## Word Salad: Vocabulary Reinforcement for Kinesthetic and Visual Learners

**LEVEL:** Upper Beginner through Advanced

**TIME REQUIRED:** 45–60 minutes

**BACKGROUND:** Teachers often do not have the time or the means to invest in creating an activity or preparing something elaborate for their classes. I found in several countries I've worked in, with adults and young learners alike, that Word Salad has captured my students' interest and reinforced vocabulary in a competitive and engaging manner. The activity requires minimal preparation and is adaptable for learners of most ages, group sizes, and language levels.

Word Salad reinforces vocabulary for visual, verbal, kinesthetic, and cognitive learners in three stages of progressing difficulty. It can be held indoors or outdoors, allowing for students in warmer climates or cramped classrooms to stretch their legs.

**MATERIALS:** Small slips of paper (two per student); a cup or other container large enough to hold the slips of paper; a timer; a way to keep score

**PREPARATION:** Prepare the materials listed above. You might have to prepare additional slips of paper with words of your own choice written on them (see the Variations section).

### PROCEDURE:

1. Pass out the slips of paper to the class, two per student, and instruct students to write a noun on each piece of paper. *Tell them not to show anyone else what they are writing.* The nouns can be anything, as long as each is a person, place, or thing. Students tend to enjoy writing classmates' names or the names of local places.
2. When students are done writing, have them fold or crumple up the slips of paper and put them in the cup or container you pass around the room.
3. Divide the class into teams. It's simplest to have two to five teams for this activity; ideally, each team has between five and ten students. For larger classes, you will need more teams. For very small classes, you can provide additional words so there are enough to provide excitement.
4. Tell students that there are three rounds to this game and that the points from each round will be added together at the end for a final winner. Let them know that being the winner of a round does not mean they win the game. Remind students that they must pay attention in each round because the game becomes harder and harder. If they are paying

attention from the beginning, that will help them in later rounds.

5. Round 1 is similar to the game called Taboo. A student from Team 1 will stand at the front of the classroom, or in the center of the semicircle if the students are arranged that way. He or she will have 60 seconds to pull out pieces of paper from the container, one by one, explain verbally what the word on the paper is *without saying the word itself*, and have teammates guess the word. When his or her teammates guess one word correctly, the student pulls another word and explains it, again without saying the word itself. The more words the team guesses correctly in 60 seconds, the more points the team gets. The person standing and explaining must not use gestures, and other teams may not guess.

It will be useful here to remind the other teams, as they are waiting for the 60 seconds to pass before their turn comes, that the more they pay attention, the more it will help them in the later rounds.

6. Team 2 then sends up a representative to have a turn, again for 60 seconds. Round 1 continues like this until all the pieces of paper in the container have run out.
7. Count up the points and announce each team's total for Round 1. Remind students that the cumulative total at the end of all three rounds will decide the ultimate winner, not the winners of one individual round.
8. Students return the slips of paper to the container to begin Round 2. If Team 3 was the last team to go in Round 1, then Team 4 begins next.
9. Round 2 is similar to charades. The students now know all the words in the container, and if they were paying attention in Round 1, they will have a

much easier time guessing the words in Round 2. In this round, the student standing at the front of the room or in the center pulls a word from the container and must "act out" the word in order to get his or her teammates to guess it correctly. The student can use actions and gestures *but must not speak or make any sounds*. Each word the team guesses correctly is worth a point, each turn lasts 60 seconds again, and the teams take turns, as they did in Round 1. Again, the round is over when all the words in the container have been used. Announce the total points at the end.

10. Round 3 is the most difficult. Collect the papers from the students and put them in the container. Tell the class that for the final round, the student standing up can say *only one word* to give his or her teammates a hint as to what is on the paper. For example, if the word is *airplane*, the student may say "flight" or "transportation," but not "air" or "plane." There is no time limit for this round, and the team may take some time to collaborate and come up with one—and only one—guess.

If the guess is correct, Team 1 gets one point, and Team 2 will continue. However, if the guess is incorrect, Team 2 can make one guess, and if it is right, Team 2 "steals" that point. If Team 2's guess is also incorrect, Team 3 has a chance to make one guess, and this continues until a team ultimately guesses correctly. The turns may even circle back to Team 1 again and continue lapping the whole class before a team guesses correctly. When the word is guessed correctly, Team 2 continues the round by sending up its representative, and the turns continue in order.

11. Round 3 continues until all the slips of paper have run out. Add up the points for all three rounds to find the ultimate winning team.

## VARIATIONS

You may also submit pieces of paper for students to use in the game. You might try including words of a similar nature. For example, if the words *universe*, *star*, *galaxy*, *planet*, and *Earth* are in the mix, students discover that Rounds 2 and 3 become substantially harder—and often more humorous. Alternatively, you might write down and include key vocabulary that the students should review from recent lessons for reinforcement.

You may change the target lexical set from general nouns to any other category, depending on what your syllabus and lesson plans are. If the class is studying a unit on music, task students with choosing key vocabulary from that unit. With this approach, the activity can be reused later in the year, as the target vocabulary can easily be changed.

If your students are at a lower level, you can replace any of the rounds with Pictionary, where students must draw a sketch on a chalkboard or whiteboard for their teammates to guess the word(s), again with a time limit of 60 seconds per turn.

## SUGGESTIONS

The first time you use this activity, particularly during Round 1, stand by the student in the center or at the front of the room to check the words that the students have written. Discard any that are too difficult, off topic, unclear, written in their native language, or repetitive.

If you have a large class, divide students into smaller groups and more teams. Assign a student to lead each subgroup, and you can monitor and circulate among the subgroups. The game will pass more quickly, and more students will be engaged at a time.

## CONCLUSION

Word Salad is created by the students, inherently adapts to their level, requires minimal resources, and can be applied to any

context. It is fun and engaging for students, and it provides an amusing context for remembering vocabulary that is reinforced in three distinct ways.

This activity was written by **Annie Chen**, who has been an English Language Fellow in Lomé, Togo, and has a master's degree in International Relations, Global Governance, and Cultural Diplomacy. She has taught English in Italy, Indonesia, Russia, Chile, India, and Uganda and has worked in experiential education in Costa Rica, Morocco, the Dominican Republic, and Ghana.